The Ramayana
Of
Valmiki

THE RAMAYANA
OF
VALMIKI

(Rendered into English Prose in 2 Parts)

PART 2

SUNDARAKANDA & YUDDHAKANDA

by

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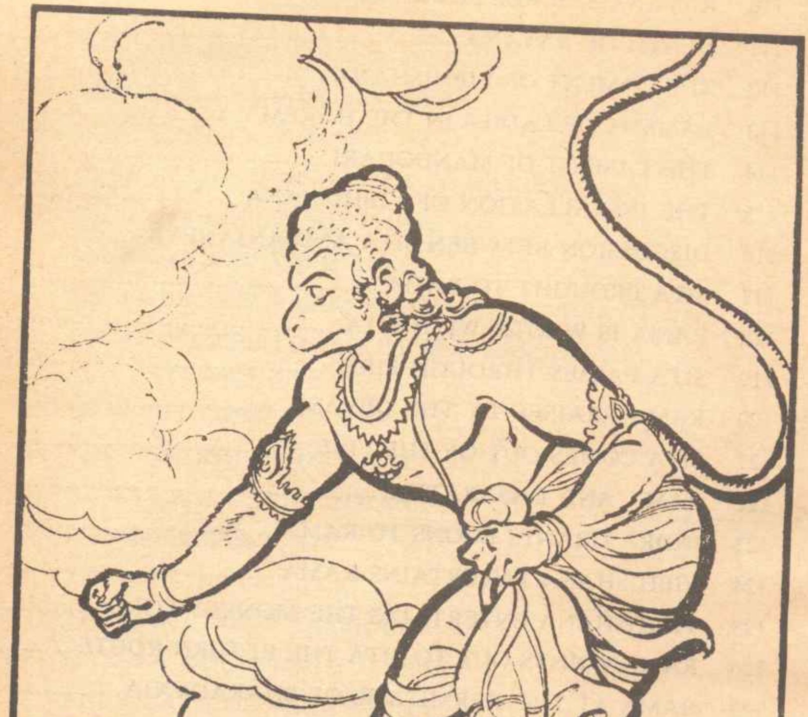


SUNDARAKANDA

PREFACE

THE opening lines give us a description of the Guru who seeks the disciple to bring light unto him.

He who waits for the disciple to come to him, driven by the fires of passion and darkness that rage in his heart, is the Guru. He who reads the heart of the disciple better than himself and sees the misery and grief that torture it, he whose heart almost breaks at the sight and speeds to him uncalled, is the Para-guru. The word Guru is fancifully rendered as follows :

The darkness of ignorance is denoted by the letter Gu; and the light that chases away that darkness is denoted by the letter Ru; hence a Guru is he who brings the disciple from the darkness to light.

Here the Guru who has identified himself with the work of keeping away with strong hands the veil of darkness that presses upon the hearts of humanity, follows in the footsteps and walks in the path of the Teachers of old who lead the world to reach the old ideals of duty, and wisdom, and comes down into the world of light and shadow, even where abides the *jiva* who is in the cruel grip of ignorance that has turned his reason astray from the path of right, and who from the beginning of time is absolutely dependent upon the Lord. The word Sita denotes that the *jiva* sprang from no known origin. Her womanhood denotes that it is ever dependent. The Lord is the Heavenly Man and all the other *jivas* are but women, his wives, and absolutely dependent upon him and looking up to him for everything.

Six are the virtues that enable the pupil to stand in the presence of the Master — pure speech, pure association, all-embracing love and the grace of the lord. And they reveal the place where the pupil is. The teacher would even ascertain most accurately the steps that the disciple takes to approach the Lord.

CHAPTER 1

MARUTI CROSSES OVER TO LANKA

HAVING been thus impelled to action by Jambavan, Anjaneya desired to seek for the whereabouts of Sita in the regions frequented by heavenly *charanas* — Sita who was spirited away by Ravana. He stood alone in his boundless might, to brush away the obstacles that would bar his way. He resolved within himself to achieve a feat that none would ever dream of. With head and shoulders upraised, he shone even like the bull at the head of its herd. He paced about all joyfully over the heights of the Mahendra mountain, carpetted with the soft grass of emerald hue, that glistened like crystal waters. The mighty lord of the monkeys, matchless of intellect, frightened off the birds around, crashed through the dense woods, and put to flight the wild beasts that made it their home, even as the lordly monarch of the woods in the fullness of his strength and vigour. The mountain was adorned with curiously shaped streaks and veins of ore, black, red and white in hue. It was the favourite resort of countless elephants ever in rut and of the heavenly *yakshas, kinnaras, gandharvas* and *pannagas,* who, taking forms at will, disported themselves on its heights in all their finery. And, like a huge elephant splashing about in the cool waters of a broad lake, Anjaneya roamed about on its slopes.

Then he raised his clasped hands in reverence to the Lord of the day who taught him all that he knew; to Indra, the lord of the celestials who was the founder of one of the schools of grammar that he learnt; to his father the Lord of Air; to Brahma who loaded him with rare boons of might and power; and last, to the elementals that ranged the worlds of the gods; and he saluted them in spirit and prepared to start. Facing the east, he once again rendered deep reverence to the Lord of Air, that brought him into the world. Then, Maruti of matchless skill, decided to search in the south and accordingly expanded his form. His friends, the monkey lords, gazed at him with wonder. He resolved firmly to cross the trackless watery waste and grew apace to secure the highest interests of Rama, even like unto the Lord of waters at the times of the conjunction of the sun and the moon. Space could not limit his growing form; desirous of taking a flying leap over the sea, he pressed the lofty mountain with his hands and feet.

And it shook to its very roots for an hour or so Its dense woods shed their tribute of many-hued flowers upon him. Mahendra was entirely hid under it, and looked like a mountain built of flowers, from which the covetous winds wafted rare perfumes. The lofty hill, so pressed by Maruti of inconceivable might, poured forth its torrents of waters, even like unto a huge elephant in rut. Crushed by the tremendous weight of Maruti's gigantic body, it showed forth its veins of ore of the colour of gold, silver and black unguent. Blocks of rock were hurled from it far and wide, mixed with ores of *manosila,* even like clouds of serried smoke from a burning fire. The denizens of its numerous caves were crushed flat by the mountain under the huge weight of Maruti and roared and howled all round in a very disagreeable manner. Earth, air, the waters, and the forests around were filled with the hideous roar. The fierce serpents that lay in its deep holes, spread their broad hoods adorned with lines resembling the feet of Vishnu and grew mad with pain and fury. They ejected their cruel and fiery venom and bit at the rocks savagely, which blazed by the consuming poison, shivered to atoms. The rare and priceless herbs and roots of occult and wonderful properties were all powerless as antidotes.

The hermits that had their homes on the mountain abandoned it; for they decided that fierce elementals were blowing it to pieces. The *vidyadharas* that disported themselves on its slopes rose aloft with their women and sought safer haunts. They left behind them empty drinking saloons, littered with gem-encrusted vessels of gold filled with mead, honey and other rare drinks and foods, curiously flavoured preparation of meat, shields made of compressed ox-hides and gold-hilted swords and daggers. Their broad and beautiful eyes, lovely as the white lotus, were, through frequent potations, now red like the lotus of that hue. Their bodies were decorated with curious patterns wrought of red sandal and flowers. Celestial maidens, adorned with tinkling anklets, bracelets, garlands and armlets, stood on high with their lovers, the lords of the *vidyadharas* and viewed from their lofty stations in the skies, the mount Mahendra, thus undergoing the pangs of dissolution and destruction before its time of *Pralaya*. It afforded them a nice chance to display their superhuman powers.

Then the great sages, the *charanas* and the *siddhas* that graced with their presence the clear empyrean, said to themselves, "This Anjaneya, the son of Vayu, huge of body even as a mountain peak, has decided to take a flying leap across the sea, hitherto impassable to any; surely he has planned to perform wonderful feasts impossible to others on the other side, all for the sake of his lord Rama and his friends the monkeys." This drew the attention of the *vidyadharas* to the mountain and to Maruti who stood there in his peerless might.

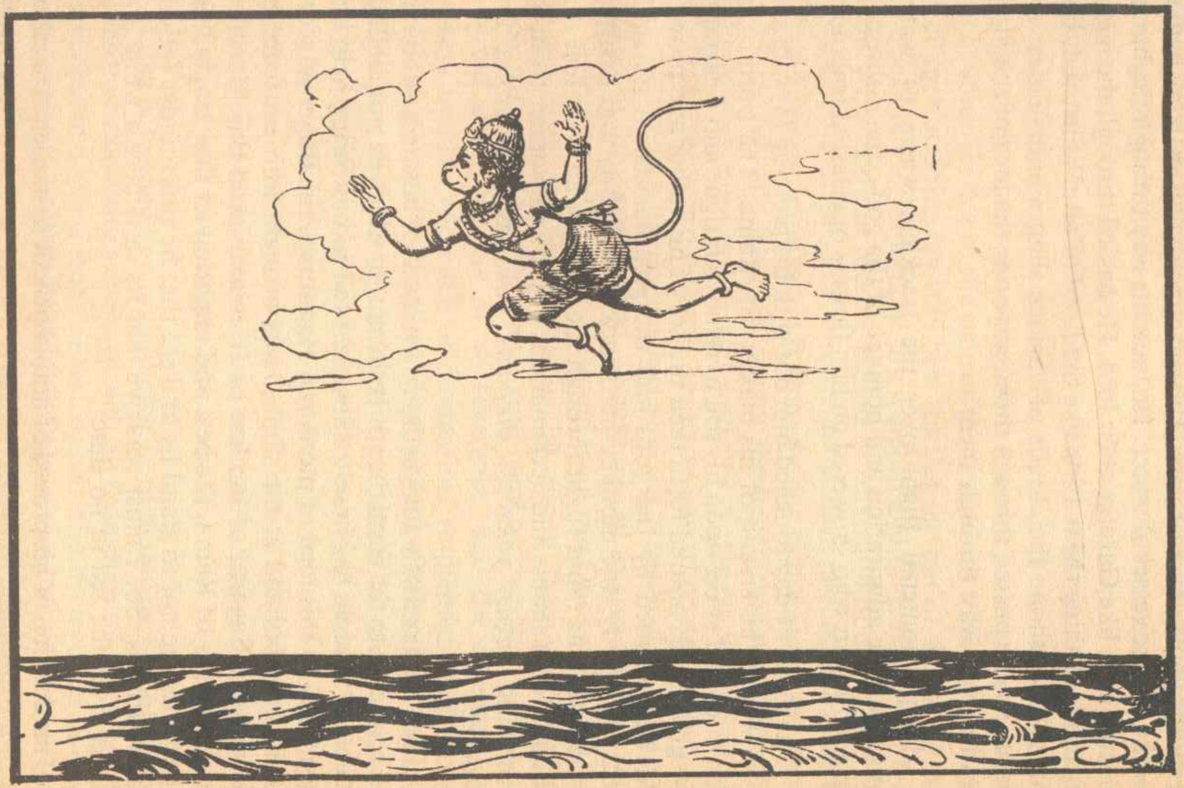
He shook his bristling hair; he rocked himself to and fro like a huge mountain about to spring; he roared frightfully like surcharged rain-clouds; and he waved aloft his long round tail covered with a thick growth of fur, even as Garuda, the lord of birds, snatches up a huge sea-serpent and whirls it round in sheer sport. He was storing in himself enough energy and power to take him over to Lanka. His splendour and might grew apace; he pressed upon the earth firmly with his arms, hard like the bolts of fortress gates; he contracted his loins, bent his legs, hands and neck a little and thus grew in himself the required strength, fortitude and energy. He cast his eyes over the route he was to take for many a mile; he gazed at the sky thoughtfully; and restrained his life-breaths in his heart. He based himself firmly upon his feet, bent back his ears, and, on the verge of taking his aerial flight, the mighty monkey turned to his comrades and said, "The fiery shaft shot from the golden bow of my lord Rama wings its flight unobstructed with the speed of my father Vayu; even so will I shoot over to Lanka ruled by the wicked Ravana. Should I fail to find the lady Janaki there, I will, without abating my speed, fly over to the world of the gods. If I come not upon her even there, I will go back and, as in sport, drag over here the ruler of the *Rakshasas* trussed like a fowl. I will not return here without my purpose achieved and without bringing back the lady Sita. Failing which, I will root up the cursed isle with its dread lord and throw it over here".

He spoke these words of comfort and cheer to his friends, rose aloft gaily from the mountain and regarded himself as equal to Garuda, the monarch of the feathered tribe. The speed that he started with, uprooted the lofty trees on the mountain; and they sprang after him, as if loath to stay behind. The wind rushing through his thighs dragged along with it in the sky, the trees and the intoxicated cranes upon them and the blown flowers that covered them. Even as the dear friends and kinsmen that accompany, for a while on his way, one that goes on a long journey, the trees followed him on his path for a while. Like the battalions that go where their king leads, the lofty trees shattered by his speed ran after him for a space. Hid by those leafy trees in full blossom, Maruti shone like a huge mountain. Even as the mountains that trembled at the sight of their dread enemy Indra and hid their lofty heads in the deep waters, the heavier trees fell into the sea after him and sank forthwith. Maruti, like a huge cloudbank, looked like a lordly mountain paved with bright fire-flies, through the garment spread over him of various hued flowers, shoots and buds. The speed that dragged them along in his path deceased gradually; and they fell into the sea, scattering far and wide their flowery tribute, even like friends that return with streaming eyes and heaving chests after they had accompanied for a while a dear one, who goes abroad on a long journey. The waters, for many a mile around, covered thick with light flowers of various hues, transferred it into the blue vault of the sky glittering with the bright stars. Maruti shone like a huge cloud rising up into the lofty skies with the chained lightnings flashing through its body; for, the rare flowers shed by his matchless speed resembled the heavens in its glory of the galaxy of stars.

Like huge serpents with five heads, he looked as he sprang aloft from the mountain top with his hands stretched out before him. The sea in front of him rapidly diminished in length through his amazing speed of flight; he seemed as if he drank it up and would next swallow the sky itself. As the monkey-hero proceeded on his airy route, his round tawny eyes blazed like lightnings, or like huge fires on the mountain tops, or like the sun and the moon rising together on the horizon. His red face and red nose shone like the orb of the sun covered with the bright red twilight. His long and thick tail looked like the banner of Indra raised aloft, as he coursed through the sky. With his teeth of a dazzling white, Anjaneya, in the midst of the circle of his tail, resembled the Lord of day in his bright periphery. The root of his tail was of a bright red, like the red ores shining through the clefts of shattered mountain sides.

As the veteran monkey crossed the sea, the wind rushing through his sides roared frightfully like angry clouds. It gave him the appearance of a huge long-tailed meteor, that flashes through the sky from north to south. Of lofty stature, the son of Anjana dashed from north to south, even like the sun in his annual flight or like a huge elephant with broad bands wrapped round his long body. His shadow fell on the waters dimly a long way ahead, while his form loomed on high even like the hull of a ship beneath the water, while its sides and masts and sails rise aloft, borne by the gale. All along his course over the waters, they whirled in eddies and foam, and deafening roar through the mad speed of his airy flight, even like one under the grip of dread epilepsy. The mountainous waves were dashed aside by the force of the wind as his breast cleaved a path through the air. Thus did that lordly monkey course with the speed of thought over the trackless waters. The gales of rain-clouds joined hands with the gales sprung of his frightful speed and churned the ocean waves to a terrible roar. The mountainous billows were dragged after him by his speed, so that the messenger of Rama seemed as if he were drawing boundary lines between earth and sky. He passed over the waves that rose one after another like the huge Meru, Mandara and other lordly mountains, as if he were there on a mission to take careful count of them. The sea raised up by the terrible speed of his flight resembled a boundless rain-cloud that hangs in the sky in autumn. Like the body of a man gradually coming into view as he divests himself of his garments, the sea showed forth to view its creatures, the whale, the crocodile, the shark, and the tortoise, now that the waters which covered them were drawn aloft. Huge sea-serpents in the depths beheld the monkey-lord as he coursed through the sky in his matchless speed and trembled in affright under the impression that they were being paid a visit by their pitiless foe Garuda.

His shadow lay gracefully on the waves thirty *yojanas* in length and ten in breadth. It followed him faithfully, even like a bank of



clouds. Maruti flew through the pathless sky devoid of any support or of any contrivance of yore. The waves across his path lay banked up like a huge vessel of water. He took his way through the haunts of birds even like Garuda, their lord. He passed through the region of clouds dashing them aside like the Lord of air. White, red, blue and yellow, shone the clouds of various shapes and shades; and Maruti, as he passed through them, gave one the idea of the moon treading her way through them.

His phenomenal flight over the trackless waste of waters compelled the admiration and homage of the gods, the *asuras* and the *gandharvas* who showered on him flowers of celestial fragrance.

The Lord of day touched him not with his piercing rays, bound as he was on an errand of his master, Sri Rama. The Lord of air blew cool and sweet upon his son to remove fatigue and weariness. The great sages poured forth their praises of his valour and prowess and were echoed by the gods and the *gandharvas,* in no slight measure. Verily, the monkey-hero took it as lightly and easily as a walkover, his rapid flight through the viewless air — a feat that brought forth shouts and acclamations of joy and wonder from the witnessing *nagas, yakshas, dikpalas, rakshasas, vibudhas* and *garudas.*

Then the Lord of waters bethought himself of how to pay honour and reverence to the royal race of Ikshvaku, to which he was mightily indebted. Said he to himself "Should I fail in bestowing help and hospitality to this lord of monkeys, Hanuman, the finger of scorn will be ever pointed at me. For, I was brought into existence by the emperor Sagara, of the line of Ikshvaku. And this Maruti is the messenger of Rama, the best and mightiest of that kingly line. It becomes me not to stand by and see that he sinks under fatigue and weariness. So, I must contrive that he rests here a while and crosses over the sea in no time."

This decision of his proved of untold benefit to himself. He called out to the mountain Mainaka that lay hid in the waters with its peaks of gold, and said, "Mate! I hope you have not forgot that Indra has placed you here as a barred fortress-gate to prevent the *asuras* from coming up from the nether world. Whenever they take it into their heads, the mighty demons, to force their way upwards, you stand in their path, covering the entrance to the under-world with your huge bulk. Besides, you have it in yourself to expand without limit above, below and on all sides. Hence, I depute you on this mission. Lord of mountains! bestir yourself. Hanuman, the monkey of peerless might, comes here flying through the air straight over you, bound on a quest connected with Rama. I am ever on the alert to be of some service to the race of Ikshvaku and will not miss this rare chance of doing my very best for this servant of theirs. Those monarchs are ever objects of my worship and reverence : and for that very reason, you too are bound to serve and honour them to the best of your might. For, this ocean has been fashioned by them; and you have taken refuge in it from the foe that thirsted for your life. Moreover, you have not forgot the benefactor who brought you here, even the Lord of air. And this Anjaneya is his darling child. Now, see you not that it lies upon you to render every help and assistance to him? So, conduct yourself accordingly. Let us not be found slothful and belated. Should we fail to give effect to our good intentions in time, the great and the noble Ones will ever hold us in contempt, and be wroth at us. So, rise up from your depths; induce Anjaneya to rest upon your peaks a while. He is our honoured guest, worthy of all reverence, and the foremost of monkeys besides. Monarch of mountains! resplendant with your peaks of gold and ever honoured by the gods! Let Maruti rest himself a while upon you; he will cross over to Lanka the more quickly. Bethink yourself of the tenderness and pity that fills the heart of Hanuman towards Sita; forget not that she has been torn rudely from the side of her lord and placed in durance vile in Lanka; bear in mind the inevitable fatigue and weariness that Anjaneya must feel; and do as I have suggested to you".

Mainaka listened to it and, like the Lord of day rising aloft from the midst of cloudbanks crowned with his thousands of rays of gold, he emerged in no time from his watery bed with his wooded slopes, creepers, shrubs and flowers. Coming up from the midst of the billows, he exposed to view his golden peaks, the resort of *kinnaras, uragas,* and other denizens of the higher worlds. Verily, he seemed to the observant eyes of the upper world, even as the Lord of light, rising up in a blue sky. Higher and higher he rose, until his head clove the cloud-banks and stayed not its course. His golden peaks were naturally of great splendour and they gave him the appearance of a mountain paved with many a sun.

Anjaneya cast his eyes on Mainaka that suddenly rose up before him with nothing to bar its course and said to himself, "Ah! this is the first obstacle in my way." It rose and rose, endlessly as it were. But Maruti stayed not his wonderfully rapid flight for it. Even as the Lord of air scattering afar the thin clouds, he lightly brushed aside with his mighty chest that monarch of the mountains. In his turn, Mainaka gauged the speed and the might of that monkey-hero and was overcome with joy and surprise. Then he came out of the mountain and, in the guise of a mortal, stood before Anjaneya in the sky and spoke to him in words of love and admiration. "Best and foremost of monkeys! You have laid yourself to accomplish what no one had dared or will ever dare to do. Rest yourself a while on my peaks. This watery waste was brought into existence by the ancestors of Rama; and you are bound on his quest. Hence, the Lord of the ocean renders you reverence and worship. Gratitude to the benefactor is the ageless law of the world. And we, desirous of following it, offer humble hospitality and pray you to accept it. For, the ocean Lord has specially deputed me to approach you with this request. 'This mighty monkey has decided to cross over a hundred *yojanas* of waters and comes towards us. Let him rest a while on your slopes and proceed thereafter, strong and refreshed.' So break your flight a while and rest your weary limbs upon me. The roots and fruits that grow on my slopes are pure, fragrant, and sweet. Partake of them; throw off your weariness and resume your flight.

There is yet another bond between us, well-known through the three worlds and approved of by the great and the good. I regard you as the best and foremost of the monkey-world, who are matchless in speed and valour. Even an ordinary guest is worthy of the respect and reverence of all right-thinking men. It goes without saying that, to one who sees into the heart of *Dharma,* you deserve the greatest honour and respect possible. For you are the darling son of Vayu, one of the foremost of the rulers of the shining Ones. What is more, you are his peer. Reverence paid to you counts as reverence paid to him; and to you, for whom *Dharma* has no secrets, this needs no saying. So, it behoves me to offer worship to you.

There is yet another reason for it. During the Kritayuga, mountains had wings and flew all over, above and below, with the speed of Vayu. They were a source of danger and fear to the gods, the sages, and all creatures, lest they might descend upon them at any moment and crush them to death.

Then Indra grew wroth with them and smote their wings away with his dread weapon *Vajra*. I saw him rushing upon me with his raised *Vajra* to cut me to pieces and gave myself up for lost. When the Lord Vayu, my noble saviour, blew me with resistless force into the ocean he stood between me and death, between me and mutilation — a living death. See you not that he is my Lord, my God, whom I should pay worship and reverence to for all time? So, I am bound to offer you honour, his only son. This is the bond that binds us together. This is the best chance that we could ever hope to get for expressing, in a feeble way, the deep debt of gratitude, we lie under to the Lord Vayu, I and the ocean Lord. Accept this service and homage at our hands, and gladden our hearts. Rest a while; accept honour, love, and reverence from us; for the very sight of you fills our heart with unspeakable joy."

And to him replied Maruti, "Lord of mountains! Your sweet words give me inexpressible pleasure. I count it enough, this having blessed myself with a sight of you. This is, in my opinion, the sweetest welcome that you could give me. Let no feeling of regret or uneasiness cloud your heart that I do not rest myself upon your hospitable slopes, as you would have me do. For, the time at my disposal is all too short for the work I have at heart. It spurs me on. Should I stay here as you desire, it is doubtful if I could reach Lanka before sunset. Besides, I have given my word to my mates that I will proceed upon my errand without breaking my flight anywhere." So, Maruti touched Mainaka affectionately and thereby accepted his hospitality; and with a glad heart and a smile upon his lips, he continued his flight through the air. Mainaka and his friend, the Lord of the ocean gazed after him with affectionate eyes and sent their blessings to keep him company.

Then Anjaneya left them far behind and rose higher into the realms of his father, the lord Vayu. He looked down with fondness and affection upon the mount Mainaka below him, and coursed through the clear sky with renewed vigour. His flight over the hundred *yojanas* of waters counts as the first of his redoubtable achievements; and his wonderful solution of the problem that was placed before him by Mainaka is the second in the list. The gods, the *siddhas,* and the great sages who were delighted witnesses to this feat lauded him to the skies. Indra was mightily pleased with Mainaka and cried, "Mighty mountain, shining resplendent with your peaks of gold! You have pleased me in no slight measure by your behaviour today. From this moment have no fear of me. Live on free of danger and dread. We were racked with terrible doubts whether Hanuman would faint and fall into the sea as he took his way across the broad expanse of waters; but the mighty hero seems to gather strength and speed as he goes, fearless, and light-hearted. You rendered him timely help; and the precious service that you did to the servant Rama fills me with boundless joy." The words of the lord of the shining Ones, put cheer and gladness into the heart of Mainaka; for his dread foe was sweetly disposed towards him. He accepted wonderful boons of Indra and lived thereafter a life of ease and joy. Hanuman left the spot far behind him and sped on his course.

Then, the *devas,* the *gandharvas,* the *siddhas,* and the *sages* approached Surasa, the mother of the serpents, who shone like the noonday sun in her radiant glory and said, "This monkey-hero, the son of Vayu, is endowed with rare effulgence. He takes a flight through the realms of his father over the broad expanse of waters. Do you, for our sake, place an obstacle on his path. Your dreadful fangs and eyes darting flames of fire, your mouth, wide as the heavens over us, and your huge bulk like the monarch of the mountains, combined with the form of a terrible Rakshasi, may, when you stand before him, take the heart out of him. For, we would, once more, try his strength and mettle. Would he overcome you by strategy, or would he faint and give it up?".

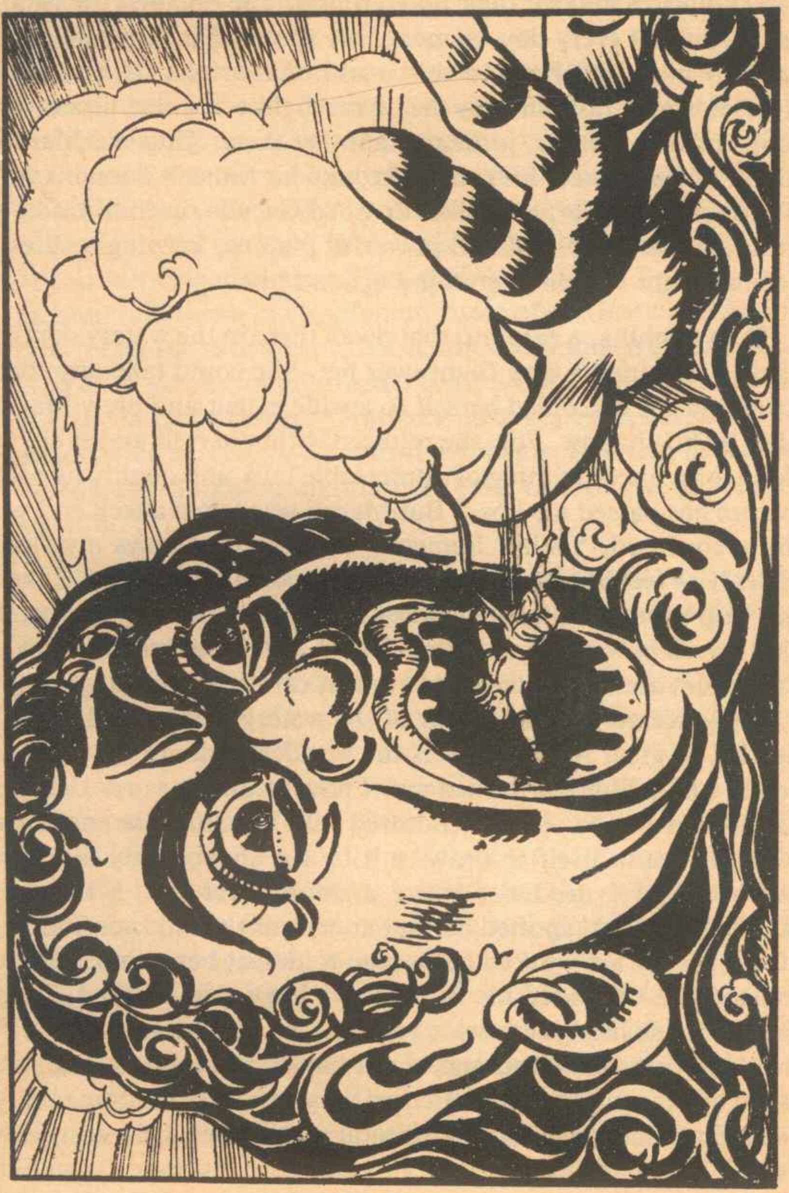
Thus besought by the gods, Surasa, assuming the huge and frightful form of a Rakshasi, stood in the middle of the ocean, barring the path of Hanuman. All creatures that beheld her, quaked in sheer and abject terror. She shouted at him in tones of thunder. "The gods have sent you here today as a toothsome delicacy to stay my appetite for a while. I would even send you down my throat. Fall you therein of your own sweet will." To which replied Maruti, his head bent low in reverence over joined palms, "Sri Rama, the son of Dasaratha, had to sojourn for a while in the forests of Dandaka and with him his brother Lakshmana and his wife Sita. He was absent from his hermitage for some hours on business; when, Ravana, the King of the *Rakshasas,* who, out of malice, was ever on the watch to do him an evil, spirited away his dear wife. And Rama, my lord, has sent me to take a message to Sita of matchless fame. Now that you are a citizen of his realm, should you not, in duty bound, help him to the best of your might? And, is this the way you put it? Well, if you are so minded, I will even come back to you to appease your hunger after having taken news to Rama of the whereabouts of his wife. You have my unbroken word for it."

Thereat Surasa laughed in contempt and said, "Verily, no one passes me without my consent. This is one of the powers that I have been gifted with. So, I see no other way past myself except by going through my mouth, wherever it may take you." But Anjaneya heeded it not and was coolly proceeding on his way. Then Surasa, inwardly glad at his calm audacity, desired to test his strength and cried, "Nay, nay, you shall proceed on your quest; but the way lies through my throat, and not otherwise. For the four-faced one, even Brahma, has so ordered me." Withal, she opened her mouth wide, and barred his path. Then Anjaneya showed signs of irritation and exclaimed, "Be it so; make your mouth large enough to give me an easy passage;" and he expanded his form to the extent of ten *yojanas.* At once Surasa made her mouth twenty *yojanas* wide. Hanuman capped it by another ten *yojanas;* and Surasa was no whit behind and made it forty. Hanuman made a higher bid of fifty and Surasa went one better and made it sixty. Then Maruti grew seventy *yojanas* in width; but Surasa was not dismayed and beat him by ten *yojanas* still. At last Hanuman showed himself ninety *yojanas* in extent; but Surasa was ahead of him and covered his huge form by hers extending over one hundred *yojanas.* This was what Maruti was waiting for. His cunning and tact made him come out ahead.

For, with lightning speed he assumed a very very minute form and passed through her huge mouth like a needle darts through a deep cave. He caught the moment right and, with a tiny body, even like that of Tom Thumb, he passed through her like a flash of light and stood clear beyond her in the sky, in all his glory and flush of victory. "Mighty daughter of Daksha, the ancient patriarch! I lay my head at your feet in reverence. I have even obeyed your behests and have passed through your mouth. I am none the worse for it; and your vow has in no way been violated. Allow me to go on my quest even to where Sita abides."

Like the bright moon emerging from the dark cavernous jaws of Rahu, Anjaneya came out of the contest victorious. Surasa resumed her form and blessed him in tones of affection and amaze. "Child! may your quest be fruitful; may your path be smooth. For, to you is given to bring together Rama and his noble consort Sita." The whole creation hailed Anjaneya in acclamation for the third of his wonderful feats.

Then Hanuman took his even course over the wide and trackless waste of waters ruled over by the lord Varuna, and impassable to any other, man or god. He resumed his frightful speed and flew through the clear expanse of sky even like Garuda, the Lord of the feathered tribe. It was the home of huge cloud-banks surcharged with refreshing showers. It was the favourite resort of the *patagas,* the *vidyadharas* and of the Airavata, the Elephant that guards one of the eight quarters of the earth. Lions, elephants, tigers and other conveyances of celestial make, roamed there, to be at the service of *patagas* and *uragas*. Curious fires, equal in splendour and power to the *Vajra* of Indra or the fierce thunderbolts, flamed therein. The great and glorious souls that won the abode of the shining Ones by their deeds of righteousness adorned it like the stars in a clear firmament. Chitrabhanu, the *agni* so called, makes it his home, even he who takes to the respective gods the offerings of men in this world during their sacrifices, public and domestic. Planets, constellations and the bright moon lent it their glory. The great sages, the *gandharvas,* the *nagas* and the *yakshas* resorted to it as a most likely meeting place. It was divided into innumerable sub-planes, clear as the hearts of the good and pervading all round. Visvavasu and



his *gandharvas* might be met with here. The seven other elephants of the Quarters make it their play-ground. The Sun and the Moon pass through it every day. A most holy spot and is very much like a canopy or a first-floor to this world of mortals. Of boundless extent, it was so fashioned by the divine architect. Great heroes and groups of *vidyadharas,* jostle one another there. Thus did Maruti, the son of Vayu, steer his course through his father's domains with no support whatever, even like the Lord Garuda, even like a huge mountain with its broad and powerful pinions, keeping a careful and observant eye on everything around him.

Then Simhika, a *rakshasi* that dwelt there in the watery depths, beheld him wing his airy flight over her. She could take any form at will and she expanded herself to a wide extent and drew Maruti to her by his shadow. For, she rejoiced within herself and said, "It is long long since anything of appreciable bulk and quality like this creature has passed my lips." But Maruti was taken aback and was a little confused. "Why? Someone or something stays my flight suddenly. I feel my energy and strength oozing out of me. Like a huge ship brought to a standstill by a hurricane dashing against it, I find myself powerless to proceed." And, out of curiosity, he looked around him and above and below, most carefully and caught sight of a huge creature standing out of the watery depths. "Ho! ho!" cried he, in great relief, "Is this the wonderful denizen of the sea against whom Sugriva warned me? I now recall his words that this monster hideous to view, is endowed with boundless strength and power. It has in itself to draw to it by the shadow any object in creation. And I need not waste a doubt over it." Maruti, of matchless intellect, spotted her out at once as the monster Simhika and his keen brain worked out a plan to defeat her, almost on the moment. He expanded his form like a huge rain-charged cloud. Simhika made her mouth wide enough like the gates of hell; with a hideous roar of a thousand cloud-banks, lightning lashed, she rushed at Maruti. Then he observed very carefully her huge body, wide mouth, hideous face and the vital spots in her. Of measureless strength and adamantine vigour, he contracted his body to a minute point and sprang into her mouth. The *siddhas* and the *charanas* beheld with wonder and anxiety this feat of Hanuman vanishing into the dreadful jaws of Simhika even as the full-moon disappears into the mouth of Rahu. Anjaneya, with the speed of thought, hacked to pieces the vital spots in her body with his keen claws; and before she had time to make a move or to close her mouth, dashed out again. His compelling rare courage and skill made it an easy task for him. He resumed his form and beheld Simhika writhing among the billows in the agonies of death, emitting frightful roars! and her heart-blood ebbing away. The inhabitants of the worlds on high cried out in amazement and joy, "Maruti, Frightful is the feat you have achieved today. You have made short work of this horrible monster of inconceivable might. Proceed on your mission and come back safe and successful. Glory and happiness crown ever the endeavours of one who like yourself is endowed with keen clear perception, unshaken fortitude, skill and unerring insight into the heart of things." And Maruti was glad at heart, for he felt assured that success would crown his efforts, now that he had bested Surasa and Simhika; and like the lord Garuda, he proceeded on his course.

Thus he drew near to the shores of Lanka; and casting his eyes around, he beheld the other end of the course of hundred *yojanas,* the forests that clothed it in dim outline. Even in mid-air, his eyes noted the graceful woods that fringed the famous isle, the wooded slopes of mount Malaya, the breakers ahead, the marshy grounds beyond, the rare and lofty trees around and the rivers that took their tribute of waters from mount Trikuta to the ocean Lord. Then he bethought himself of his huge shape that blotted out the sky and earth like a large cloud. "It is folly to keep up this form of mine and this terrible speed when I go among the *rakshasas;* for, they will naturally be filled with surprise and apprehension and try to make me out; and that is what I cannot afford to risk." So, like a Sun of Wisdom who casts aside the clouds of doubt and darkness that lay heavy upon his soul, Anjaneya resumed his original shape. It called to an observer the mighty world-drama of old, when Mahavishnu spread himself over the worlds as the Lord Trivikrama and having drawn into himself the might of Bali, the king of the *Asuras,* he showed himself as Vamana. It was an easy task for him to resume any shape, large or small, fair or frightful. He achieved the tremendous feat of leaping over one hundred *yojanas* of water unmolested by his foes. He reminded himself of his purpose at

Lanka and reduced his vast dimensions accordingly. He touched ground on the peaks of mount Suvela whose head was lost in the clouds and which seemed hanging from the isle far into the sea. Maruti alighted on it, graced with pleasant groves and magnificent trees.

He reached the end of his journey, crossed to the other shore and from his lofty station on high, he observed Lanka built on a peak of the mount Trikuta. He changed the form that he had kept till then. And his presence on the lofty mountain put to flight the beasts and the birds thereon. He, out of his boundless might, flew over the vast sea, the home of *devas* and ***pannagas*** and of waves mountain high. He alighted on the shores of Lanka and from afar beheld the capital of Ravana glorious like Amravati.

Notes.

1. Valmiki's pen picture : — This Canto is, as it were, a huge portrait gallery. Valmiki has shown himself a master painter, equally at home and peerless in every branch of it, individual portraits, groups, landscapes and battle scenes. Maruti's wonderful leap over the sea is, in a way, a series of such pen pictures. His gradual passage through the air affords the poet a fine scope of presenting us with various views of it from the shores he left behind him and of the expanse that lay before him. We then have a bird's eye view of Lanka from his lofty perch on high, from the sea-shore, from the crest of mount Trikuta, and from the city walls. He paints for us the capital itself as it lay under the eyes of Hanuman who ranged over it.

CHAPTER 2

LANKA

HANUMAN, the mighty, crossed over, without the slightest sign of fatigue or weariness, the sea, till then impassable to any, and cast searching look at Lanka fashioned wonderfully on the crests of Trikuta. He was covered all over with the flowers from the trees around and gave one the idea of an image of a monkey whom its worshippers fashioned of flowers. Matchless in prowess, he leapt over one hundred *yojanas* of water; but it tired him not the least nor did he breathe hard. "Why! I can very easily cross over many a hundred *yojanas* like this. It is nothing to me, this initial flight."

Having leapt clear over the sea, he took his way towards Lanka, unmatched by any one in valour or in power of flight. Swards of emerald green grass, forests of fragrant trees with huge blocks of granite scattered among them, met his view as he passed along. He left behind him hills covered with trees of various kinds and groves in full blossom. Standing on a peak of the Trikuta, he cast his eyes over the intervening woods and the thick undergrowth beyond until they met the walls of Lanka built on the three- crested mount. *Saralas, karnikaras, kharjuras,* in full blossom; *priyalas, muchilindas, kutajas, ketakas, priyangus, gandhapurnas, nipas, saptaparnas, asanas, kovidaras* and *karaviras,* hid amongst flowers and buds and bending under their weight; stately trees paved as it were, with various hued birds, trilling forth their liquid melody, and gracefully nodding their heads to one another; sheets of water bright with swans and water-fowls of various kinds, and white lotus, red lotus and *utpalas* of dark beauty; pleasant resorts and parks for the masses; deep pools where men may dive, swim and disport themselves; royal gardens for the highest of the land, beautifully laid out with trees ever in fruit and blossom — all these and more met the eye of Maruti as he drew near the capital.

And this was the home and the town of Ravana, girt with deep moats covered with lotus, dark *utpala,* and other flowers. Its lord guarded it even more carefully than before, now that he had brought there Sita, dearer to him than anything. *Rakshasas* of frightful mien were ever on the alert all around, armed with bows and arrows. Its walls of gold were lost in the lofty skies. Its mansions, stately of form and dazzling white in their coat of rare cement, gave one the idea of the sacred planets or of autumnal clouds. The fortress walls were provided at regular intervals with favourable vantage grounds of attack and defence. Here rose aloft banners with flags worked in gold and silver patterns of tree and creeper. There met the eye others of the same kind fashioned curiously like the monsters of the deep. Splendid porticoes of gold, engraved with curious designs of creeper, leaf and flower, dazzled the eye. One could be pardoned for mistaking it for Amaravati, the capital of the gods.

Anjaneya cast his eyes on that island fortress with its mansions dotted all over the mountain slopes and heights and fancied it to be a huge city about to take an airy flight. It was Visvakarma, the architect of the gods, that planned it. It was ruled by no less a person than Lord Ravana. Verily, Lanka, the fair damsel, shone in all her beauty and radiance. For, her fortress walls and battlements thereon were her broad and shapely hips. The deep moats of clear and crystal water were her fleecy white garments. The countless weapons of war ranged on her walls were her wealth of hair. The coigns of vantage on the battlements were the ornaments that decked her shell-like ears. Though planned and fashioned by Visvakarma, it struck one as a pure creation of the mind of a divine artist in the golden hours of his inspiration.

Anjaneya was now close to the northern gate and cast his eye over it as it rose to the heavens like a huge peak of the snowcapped mount Kailasa. The lofty palaces gave it the look of essaying a flight into the sky. Like Bhogavati, jealously guarded by the fierce *Nagas,* like a huge mountain cave, fatal to approach on account of the cruel serpents around it, countless *Rakshasa* warriors with cruel fangs and frightful looks ever patrolled it, armed from head to foot. It was originally built as a capital for Kubera and was lovely beyond description, even beyond the power of imagination to conceive. Its fortifications were simply wonderful; besides, it was set in the midst of a trackless waste of waters ever impassable to any. Further, its lord and ruler was Ravana, the sound of whose name turns to water the hearts of all that hear it.

Hanuman pondered over it deeply and said, "It is almost impossible for the monkey-hosts to come over here; even then, they would have nothing for their pains. The embattled hosts of the *devas* can make no impression upon this island fortress in a siege. Perhaps, my Lord Raghava may somehow manage to come over here, to this *rakshasa* capital, verily impregnable in its fortifications and under the sleepless eye of its ruler, the dread Ravana. Well, even then, I doubt greatly if he could effect anything. The four expedients of kingly polity have no place here. Conciliation is out of question with these *rakshasas* of demoniac instincts. Inducements or attractions of any kind would fail miserably in the case of this abode of boundless wealth and splendour. Dissensions would be but a waste of energy with cruel giants bloated with pride and conceit of their strength, valour, and prowess. Their skill, strategy and resource keep pace with their might; and hence, it is verily useless to think of fighting them to a finish. Angada, Nila, Sugriva, and myself are perhaps the only ones that could manage to cross over here."

"Let that be. My first thought and care must be to ascertain if the lady Janaki is among the living or not. Let me find her alive; there is time enough to think about my future plans." He sat on the mountain crest for an appreciable length of time, plunged in deep thought of how to compass the interests of Rama and come at the prison house of Sita.

"When shall I enter the city? What form shall I take? It is utterly foolish to do it as I am. Mighty *rakshasas* patrol every inch of ground here, cruel beyond description and shining in their energy and prowess. I must pass through them unseen to begin my search for the lady Sita. I should take such a form as could not be easily detected by others; besides, it must aid my purpose. A huge and terrible shape would be easily spotted by the *rakshasas,* and a too minute shape cannot be of any use to me in a thorough search through the city. The night is the best time for me to enter the town and achieve my end."

He once again gazed at Lanka which the very gods dared not approach and discussed plan after plan of search.

"How shall I manage to get at the lady Janaki unknown to the wicked Ravana? What is the best means I should adopt so that the purpose of the all-wise Rama shall not fail? What expedient shall I diverse to meet Sita alone? Verily, they say true that even successful missions prove barren of results, like a mist before the Lord of day, should they be entrusted to a brainless agent who knows not to shape his efforts consonant to time and place. Why, it goes further. A king should consult deeply with his ministers and advisers upon the pros and cons of everything, its possibilities, its obstacles; and then entrust the execution of it, to an intelligent agent. Should he make a mistake in it, the master would have to thank himself for his stupidity. For, agents come to think themselves extremely wise and resourceful and take the best course to spoil the business entrusted to them. But, the purpose of Rama should not miscarry. Shall I enter Lanka even now, in broad day-light; or, is it better to wait till night falls? Shall I keep on this huge shape? Or shall I take a very minute one? Never shall it be said of me that I was a fool; nor shall it go to waste, my leap over the waters. Rama, from whom nothing is hid, intends to destroy, root and branch, Ravana, the demon king. So, should I be discovered by the *rakshasas* during my search, my Lord's purpose would be foiled. It is utterly impossible even for a moment to move hereabout with the shape of a monkey or a *rakshasa,* and not be spotted out by the people. What then of other forms? So, it is all unwise to enter Lanka with this huge form of mine. Verily, I think that even my father, the lord Vayu, cannot move hereabout unknown to these demons. For, nothing is beyond the ken of these mighty *rakshasas*. Certain death is my lot should I remain here in this form of mine. And then, good-bye to my master's mission. So, I decide to enter Lanka after dark in a very minute form, so that Rama's object shall be achieved. Till then, I lie hid in some mountain cave. And then, I will take advantage of the night to enter this capital of Ravana, unapproachable by others and make a thorough search, until I come upon Sita." Thus, the monkey-hero, bent his energies to the task of finding out the whereabouts of Sita, and eagerly awaited the sunset.

And the sun did set at last, and brought the lady Night in his wake. Maruti reduced his huge bulk to the proportions of a cat; and it was wonderful to see.

He left his retreat at twilight and made a hasty entry into Lanka, with its streets and roads and squares beautifully laid out. It gave one the idea of a *gandharvanagara* with its row of palaces adorned with pillars inlaid with gold and silver and windows and doors of beaten gold. (The illusion of towers, dooms and palaces seen in the sky resembling a beautiful city, is called the city of the *gandharvas* and is nothing but a series of cloud-banks. It is a bad portent and presages dreadful battle). Palaces, seven and eight storeys high, dazzled the eye with their floors of crystal inlaid with mosaics of gold and gems, and garlands of pearls and precious stones. The doors of the mansions were decorated with gold and cast a bright and yellow light over the city.

Maruti, intent on his search for Sita, beheld that city of the *rakshasas,* fairer than the dream of an artist and glorious in its surpassing beauty; and his heart was a prey to conflicting emotions of despair at the thought of its impregnability and surprise at its wondrous perfection. He could not contain himself at the sight of Lanka, guarded by the demons of frightful valour, and ruled over by the Lord Ravana, its white domes and turrets piercing the sky and its windows and lintels of massive gold encrusted with gems.

And, as if to render all possible help to Maruti and take away his weariness and fatigue, the Lord of night ascended to her lofty throne and casting her veil of brilliant light over the earth, shone in all her radiance of countless rays in the midst of the twinkling stars. Hanuman gazed at the Dispeller of darkness clad in spotless white like the perfect conch or milk or the filaments of the lotus and exclaimed "Do I behold in the lofty sky a lordly swan sailing joyfully over the limpid waters? For, this luminary of matchless splendour can be no other than that."

CHAPTER 3

THE GUARDIAN OF LANKA

TOWERING aloft on the peak of Suvela, otherwise known as Lamba, that looked as if a huge cloud-bank brooded over the isle, Maruti of matchless intelligence, gathered into himself the necessary energy and capacity to enter the *rakshasa* capital and scour it through.

It was night when he was well within its walls. Lovely garden surrounded it, lovelier yet in their garb of flowers. Well-watered and deep-wooded, it was lined with noble mansions that presented the appearance of autumnal clouds. The busy hum of the city sounded as the distant roar of muffled waves. A pleasant breeze was ever playing over it from the waters around. Like the Alaka of Kubera, it was vigilantly guarded by well-kept troops. Elephants in rut were chained to lofty porticoes of dazzling white. It was as jealously guarded as Bhogavati, the capital of the Serpents. Chained lightnings flashed through the tall turreted buildings; for, they were lost in the regions of the bright stars. Soft and pleasant gales refreshed the people in it, at all hours of the day and night. One would not be guilty if he mistook it for the Amaravati of Indra. Battlements of solid gold enclosed it. The tiny bells of silver and gold that covered the flags and banners tinkled sweet music to the ear.

Maruti passed his eye in wonder unspeakable over these on his way to the golden fortress walls. And his joy and surprise was no whit less when he gazed from afar upon doors of gold, gem-encrusted platforms, floors adorned with curious mosaics of precious stones, crystal and pearls; lordly elephants in rut fashioned of pure molten gold; sky-scrapers of flashing silver with steps of gold and soft crystal dust; lofty halls with their roofs lost in dim darkness and religious gloom; the pheasant, the heron, the peacock, the swan and other rare birds blending, their notes sweetly with the sound of gay music and ladies' ornaments; and last, but not the least, the strange delusion that came over one that the city was about to wing its way into the blue vaults of heaven.

Hanuman let his eye rest on that capital of the *rakshasas* for a while and could not keep himself from exclaiming "Wonderful indeed! It is utterly impossible for any foe even to raise his eyes to this Lanka; and these *rakshasa* troops of Ravana that guard it day and night, armed to the teeth, well, they are something to reckon with. None of my mates can even have heard of this. I may, however, make an exception of Angada, Mainda-Divida, Kumuda and Sushena. But only Sugriva, Kusaparva, Ketumala and myself can ever hope to get past these walls."

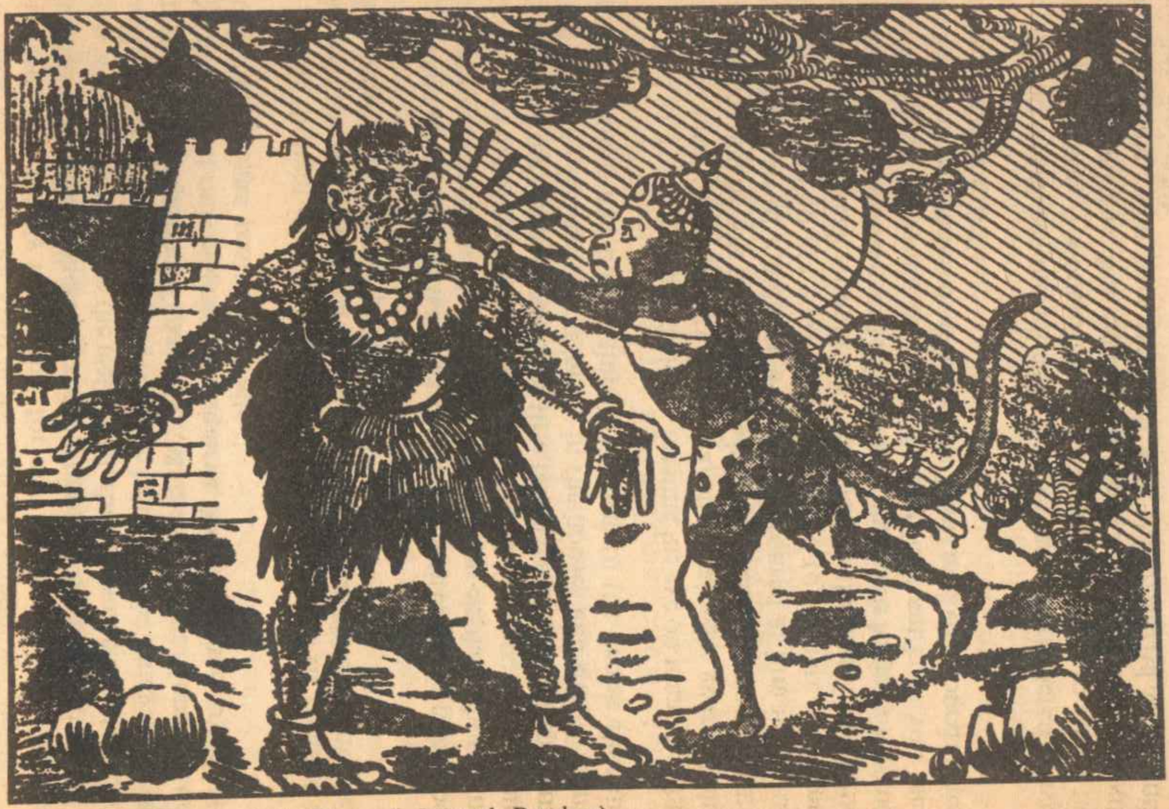
The thought clouded his heart for a space; but, he recalled to himself the valor of Rama and the prowess of Lakshmana and grew as elated as he was despondent.

The noble dame Lanka, was gorgeously attired in her rich robes of gemmed fortress-walls; the spacious stalls for elephant, horse and cattle were the ornaments that graced her shell-like ears; the armours that dotted the ramparts were her firm breasts; and the brilliant gems that did duty for lights and lamps in the houses and out of them, made darkness and dusk a thing unknown to the people therein.

And as Anjaneya passed along, feasting his eye on many a sight, rare and lovely, the mighty elemental that jealously guarded the city, noted that he was trying to get within the walls and stood before him in the guise of a hideous woman and roared at him in a tone of thunder. "Who are you? What have you to do here, a ranger of the woods? Speak straight ere I send you to the mansions of the dead. Fierce *rakshasas* guard this day and night. His Majesty Ravana cherishes it as he would his very life; and here am I, as you see, the Power that watches over its safety. Fool! and you hoped to get an easy access to it"!

Maruti heard her out all calm and serene and rendered grave reply and gentle. "Woman! it gives me real pleasure to speak to you straight and true. But, excuse me. May I know something about my questioner, who bars my path with this frightful mien and haughty speech?"

Naturally enough, the guardian of the island fortress was roused to wrath at the temerity of the creature who would not answer her



(Block : By Courtesy of the Bhavan's Journal, Bombay) legitimate questions but would even venture to make her give an account of herself. "Thou wretch of a monkey, pay heed unto me; for I will even reply to you ere I make short work of you. I am here at the command of my master, King Ravana, to watch over this city in sleepless vigilance. No one ever thinks of standing up to me. And, you, poor mite, think seriously of putting a slight upon me and surviving it! Lo! I draw the life-breaths out of your poor body. For I am Lanka; I guard it above, below, and all around."

Maruti called up only as much energy as was enough to overcome the elemental. He stood before her calm and unruffled as a lofty mountain and spoke back to the terrible shape that threatened his life and the success of his mission. "The desire is strong upon me to behold at closer view this Lanka, its houses, its palaces, fortresses, woods, gardens and groves, I am here to please myself with a sight of all these wonders."

The city guardian was all the more enraged at this cool and clever reply. "Miserable fool of a monkey! All in good time; and that is when you worst me in fair fight. You set no foot in it ere you have achieved that impossible feat. And then, the Lord Ravana will take care of you."

She smote him hard with cruel words and fierce. But Maruti answered her all gently, "Well, well, I know nothing of it. Let it be. I do feel as if I were inclined to take my own time to see the sights of this wonderful island-city of yours and go back when I have enough of it."

The words were hardly out of his mouth when the demon-watcher rushed upon him with a hideous roar and hit him hard. Hanuman was at last roused to anger. Yet he would not hit a woman with his right hand, though it was in self-defence. He shot out with his left and, to speak the truth, there was not much of wrathful feeling behind the blow, for the very same reason. But it was all too much for the she-devil; and she measured her length on the ground with her frightful bulk and baleful eyes. Maruti then bethought himself that his enemy was a woman and his heart was touched with pity.

But her conceit had clean gone out of her, the poor demoness. Her limbs shook with mortal terror and she was scarce able to speak what she would, even to beg for her life. "Lord of monkeys! have mercy on me. Noblest of mortals! grant me my life. Mighty heroes, strong in their strength and bravery, do not slay poor women. I am no other than this city Lanka. I confess that you have overcome me out of your matchless might. And allow me to acquaint you with another fact; it is true, every bit of it".

"In the far past, the Lord Brahma granted me this strange boon. 'Some day in the distant future, a monkey-hero will worst you in fair fight. And that day shall ring the death-knell of fair Lanka and its *Rakshasa* brood."

"I look at you and make a fair guess that the eventful day has come. For, the word of the Ancient of Days ever comes true. The black-hearted Ravana and his *rakshasa* hordes are even now drawing their last breaths, all on account of the lady Sita. Best and bravest of the monkey-world! this broad city is thine to work your will upon it. Enter thou this fated capital, already consumed to ashes by the blazing curses of tortured souls and search for Sita at your sweet will and pleasure."

CHAPTER 4

THE SEARCH FOR SITA

THE monkey-hero of great spiritual might, having overcome the guardian of Lanka by his valor, bethought himself of the ancient rule of Polity that "One who desires to enter the town, village or the house of his enemy and desires the success of his plans, should make his entry at a place where there is no regular gate or any other opening." So, he lightly leapt over the fortress walls, where there was no gate. Nor did he forget the advice of Brihaspati that one should put his right foot first when he enters his house, or that of a foe or goes upon a journey or starts for a marriage celebration. So he cried "Let success crown my efforts" and set his right foot within the town of Lanka, as if he placed it on the head of his foes to send them down to eternal perdition.

He made the round of the city along the royal roads that lay ·soft to the touch from the thickly strewn flowers of rare perfume. Gay laughter and the sweet music of instruments fell upon his ears everywhere. The mansions of the wealthy, fashioned like the *vajra* of Indra or the elephant-god, rose into the sky like a fleet of clouds, with broad windows curiously inlaid with many a flashing gem. There were yet other castles built after the model of the lotus, the cross and the *vardhamana* (having doors on all sides), dazzling like filmy cloud-banks.

And that monkey veteran, ever intent upon the highest interests of Rama and Sugriva, took his way around Lanka and said to himself in high glee "Verily, this is a sign unmistakable that the mission on which my masters have sent me will bear golden fruit; for, I have succeeded in making an entry into this stronghold and range at will through it unobstructed; and this, the dread Lanka that few even dream of finding their way into".

Then, he searched for Sita in every house; and his eye was drawn to many a palace, tower and castle, fashioned after many a curious design. Noble dames, somewhat the worse for the potations they had taken, were discoursing sweet music in the three pitches, low, middle and high, proceeding from the chest, the throat, and the head; and Maruti fancied himself in the halls of heaven, listening to the dulcet melody of the *apsarasas*. There was wafted to his ears yet other sounds of the sweet tingle of anklets and waistbands of the fair damsels that illumined the palaces of the nobility and the sharp yet pleasant chink of the ornaments of the ladies as they chanced to come against the broad and noble steps that led to the rooms above. The sharp cracks of robust athletes as they smacked their thighs and shoulders preliminary to the contests; the solemn chants of priests and pious souls at their earnest devotions; the muttered sounds of charms and spells and runes from students of magic, black and white; the vibrant tores of heralds, bards and minstrels and admirers of Ravana as they sang his praises out of a full heart and throat — these and many a strange sound and weird, claimed the attention of the son of Vayu as he sped on his quest.

The troops lay encamped on all the royal roads. Astute spies were threading their way through the huge encampment in the middle of the city, busy with their task of finding out the inmost secrets of the councillors, ministers, officers and the leading men of the city.

During his search, he also came upon *rakshasas* who had taken the vow of sacrifice upon hermits, with long coils of matted hair; upon others who had just finished their vows and had taken a shave in consequence; upon others who were clad in robes of cow-skin, in that they were going through a course of spells; upon ascetics clad in viewless air; and upon yet other practitioners of high magic who were ever armed with bundles of the sacred *kusa* grass to keep away foes and obstacles; and upon professors of the black arts, ever armed with fireplaces, so to speak, in that they were always busy with making oblations to the fire-place to create terrible powers of evil known as *kritya* and *sakti,* for the annihilation of their foes.

Here and there were to be seen men clad in full armour and armed with every kind of weapon; creatures with but one ear, pot-bellied *rakshasas,* curious specimens of the male species with hanging breasts, forms too hideous to see, others with noses curved like beaks, tall men, short men, others who sported with bows, swords, guns and crowbars, yet others who were encased in ponoply of curious make and design. Others were neither too fat nor too lean, neither too tall nor too short, neither too fair nor too dark, neither too much hunched nor too dwarfish. Others were of hideous form and features or of dissolving shapes or fair to look at or dazzling to behold; some brandished banners, flags, swords, *sakti* (magic wands) and nooses. Some walked about idly, decked gaily with sandal paste, garlands and ornaments. Some relied upon their sharp tridents and keen *vajras* for defence; some titans despised weapons of every kind, for their long and mighty arms were quite enough for all purposes. And at last, Maruti came upon the dread imperial guards of Ravana (the *Mulabala)* ranged in battle array and past the power of any one to count.

Next, there met his eyes the grand palace of Ravana himself with its immense portals fashioned of priceless gold. It was firmly built on the hill Trikuta; wide moats paved with blooming lotus girdled it; the walls were lost to view in the dim blue vaults of the sky. It was a fit home for the very gods and recalled their mansions on high.

The neigh of the horses, the trumpeting of the elephants, the sweet music of clashing ornaments, palanquins, sedans, litters, and other conveyances, lofty domes, horses endowed with all perfection, elephants of snowy white like fleecy clouds and adorned with four tusks, and beasts and birds mad with joy met his eyes everywhere. Countless soldiers of frightful bulk and mien, patrolled its entrances. And the son of Vayu entered the mansion of the *rakshasa* king, without the slightest hesitation or tremor. The lofty walls were fashioned of priceless gold of various kinds; halls and saloons were paved with gems; the heavy perfume of rare sandals and aloes, hung over the place where the harem of Ravana rose aloft, as Maruti was lost to view in its huge portals.

CHAPTER 5

LANKA BY MOONLIGHT

THEN the Queen of night sailed into view of Maruti of matchless intellect, into the expanse of the sky, like a proud bull roaming free through his herd, and casting the net of moonlight over all the quarters, through the power of her illimitable radiance. (He entered Lanka at moonrise; and by the time he came to the palace of Ravana it was midnight). She brought delight to the hearts of all; hence, she was the dispeller of grief and sorrow that dogged the footsteps of sin.

The oceans raise their clasped hands of waves to welcome her approach. She makes bright everything she touches in this mortal world. And Hanuman cast his eyes upon the moon thus sailing in the limitless expanse of the heavens.

The Mandara mountains, the ocean at the hour of twilight and the red lotus of the pools, shine in matchless beauty; even so, splendour and radiance have their eternal abode in the Queen of night. Roaming at will through the snow-white sky, she resembled a lordly swan disporting herself in its silver cage; or the monarch of the woods walking through the huge cavern in the mount Mandara; or the proud warrior on the back of his lordly elephant.

It reminded one of a splendid bull with its crescent horns; or the snow clad peaks of mountains; or an elephant with tusks shod with gold. Free from the mire of dewdrops, the moon shone pure, hiding from view the planets Venus and Jupiter. Her supreme pallor brought into prominence the inevitable spot in her; and that added to her charms. Verily, she gave one the idea of the tawny-manned king of beasts reclining at his ease on the broad slabs without his cave or a huge elephant in rut, roaming through a wide field of battle or a monarch fresh from his coronation bath.

The ineffable radiance of the moon dispelled the darkness of the world. The *rakshasas* came out of their haunts in search of human flesh. Dames of unsurpassed loveliness put away from themselves, pride haughtiness and anger. The hour drew near when the earth vied with the abode of the immortal gods in everything that delights the heart of man. The soft melody of the lute and other musical instruments fell sweetly upon the ear. Devoted wives slept soundly in the arms of their lords. *Rakshasas* and the other creatures that roamed abroad at night, gambolled in all their amazing fierceness and strength. The inmates of the *rakshasa* homes indulged freely in the delights of the table and lost count of every important duty. Elephants, horses, chariots and other conveyances met the eye on all sides. The Goddess of victory and heroism held sway over Lanka.

In the lordly mansions, some exchanged chaff and light banter. Some cast their huge well-shaped arms on the shoulders of their friends. Some raved in sweet incoherence under the influence of liquor. Some bullied one another. Others shouted their war cries, and slapped their huge chests and shoulders.

Some cast their limbs on their beloved that lay by them. Some masqueraded themselves many a wise to secure the affections of those whom they loved. In other houses some were found stringing huge bows. Others of witching loveliness cast sweet scents and perfume over themselves. Other ladies woke from a deep sleep and after a short chat with their beloved, fell asleep again. Yet other haughty beauties disported themselves with their husbands and indulged in silver laughter and sweet dalliance; while some others sighed deep like a wounded serpent, having been somehow offended by their lords. A huge expanse of water, a boundless gulf teeming with fierce serpents of huge bulk, that was the view that flashed across one at the sight of Lanka, with its elephants roaring like cloud-banks, full of good men and pure who were rightly reverenced by others and of veterans in war sighing deep only because they could not come upon any one to afford them even a short hour of satisfaction in a trial of valour.

Maruti passed through the town delighting his eyes with the sight of men of high intellect, sweet-spoken citizens, devout and pious souls, heroes famed through the countless worlds and other *rakshasas* of diverse shapes, habits, customs and happy names. His eyes fell upon others of perfect proportions; upon many who delighted in strange diversified traits; upon others whose forms matched with their character; upon women who shed a hallow around them and upon others to whom nature denied attractions of any kind. He failed not to notice some that approached the age of marriage; others of sweet innocence and pure; other paragons of fidelity; yet others whose hearts swayed between their lords and wine; upon other *rakshasa* ladies brilliant like the famous constellations. Others illumined the space around with the splendour of their forms; others were beside themselves with joy; and yet others met his eye as they slept in the arms of their beloved, like a lovely bird at night hid under a cloud of flowers. Yet other ladies of pure and righteous soul, found a place in the inmost depths of their husbands' heart and lay on the bosom of their lords in the sweet moonlight, on white terraces rendered whiter yet by the dazzling moonlight. Some maidens flashed like chainlightning, in that their garments were lightly cast aside by the envious breeze. Yet others lay like matchless statues fashioned of priceless molten gold; yet others resembled the pale moon in the freshness of their grief at the separation from their beloved lords. Some damsels sought out their lovers and indulged themselves to their heart's content. Faces that put to shame the moon in her full; eyes delicately shaded with slightly curved lashes; and ornaments that flashed like forked lightning met his eye everywhere.

He came not upon the lady Sita of matchless beauty and unparalleled virtue. His eyes hungered for a sight of the daughter of Janaka, the wise One, brought up in the highest traditions of the race. Tall and stately as a creeper covered with bright flowers, he was yet to meet the lordly queen of Ayodhya, the peerless lady who came down into the mortal world to accomplish the work that the Lord set himself to do. She was the best exponent of the wifely virtues that came down along the stream of time in the Aryan race; she counted life as nothing, torn away from the side of her beloved Rama; her heart was ever with him; and she ever lived in his heart of hearts; for, they were the divine primeval Pair. Maruti came not upon Janaki, the crest-jewel in the diadem of noble womenhood. Consumed with the raging fire of grief at the separation from her lord, her voice almost lost in the sobs that kept pace with her fast-falling tears, she yet wore upon her person the ornaments that reminded her of the happy days she spent with Rama in the forests of Dandaka. Her eyelashes bristling with joy, her voice soft and melodious as the notes of the cuckoo in spring, she reminded one of the lovely peacock dancing in all the splendour of her thousand-eyed feathers at the sight of the black storm-clouds; and Maruti's eyes were not blessed yet to catch a sight of the lovely vision. Pale and attenuated, like the moon in her dull orb of fading rays; like a golden statue coated with dust and dirt; cruel grief consuming her heart like a deep wound that healed over apparently while the barb and the poisoned flesh rankled within her dear hopes all shattered like fleecy clouds before a gale, such was the dear lady of Rama, whom Maruti sought in vain. He explored spaces where even his sire, the Lord of air, had no access to; but his heart was a stranger to peace and joy, in that he came not upon the object of his quest, the lady Sita, that paragon of wives, dear to the soul of Rama, the Lord of the world, of sweet speech, of mighty import. And Hanuman was a prey to dark despondency, even as one bereft of his senses.

CHAPTER 6

THE SEARCH FOR SITA *(Continued)*

MARUTI, of matchless splendour, sat for a while on the domes and turrets, sunk in thought and dazed, as it were. Then he collected himself and plucked hope and courage out of black despair. He changed his form as occasion demanded it and renewed his search for Janaki throughout Lanka; and, after a time, he came to the lofty palace of Ravana. (Ramanuja, one of the commentators, explains it that Maruti came to the palace once before, but finding the guards on the alert, he withdrew, waiting for a more safer chance to search the palace; he continued his work, meanwhile, in the city and came back when it was late in the night). The abode of the emperor of the *rakshasas* was enclosed by lofty walls, rivalling the Lord of day in splendour. Fierce *rakshasas* of huge stature and matchless valour guarded it ever, as lions keep watch over their forest haunts. Lofty porticoes of gold and silver, curiously wrought, adorned its front. The lintels, the gates, and the guard-rooms were fashioned and laid out after designs unknown in the worlds of men. Countless elephant guards, battalions of infantry, ever vigilant and tireless, war horses of noble breed that defied the lethal weapons of the enemy and serried ranks of chariots, kept sleepless watch over the palace day and night. Huge cars threaded the city on all sides, inlaid with gold, silver and ivory, and spread with the skins of lions and tigers and ever rumbling like distant thunder. The lordly mansion of Ravana was veritable museum of rare vessels, couches, lounges, divans, flashing with gold and gems, of unknown variety. Beasts and birds, rare and beautiful, roamed in thousands all round, each brought up as suited its habits and class. Frontier guards, specially trained for that purpose, kept tireless watch over the capital, dearer to them than their very lives. Like the dark and fathomless deep, the city gleamed with the splendour of noble dames and gave a muffled roar as of distant waves, as the brezee wafted over the gay laughter of the citizens and the sweet sounds of the priceless ornaments they wore. The town wanted nothing that could conduce to the happiness of kings. The sky was heavy with the perfumes of the sandal and aloes. Noble men and women graced it, even like mighty lions and lionesses in a vast forest. Huge war drums, kettle drums, conches and other instruments of martial music sounded ever through the city. Not a day passed without due worship being offered with flowers incense and perfumes to the Powers that kept watch over it. The sacred days of the New and Full moons were devoted to the rites of fire to ward off evil and invite everything auspicious and good. The mansion of Ravana was the centre of the love and reverence of his myriads of subjects who paid worship due to it as holy spot, as the abode of their lord and master. Lanka could, in no wise, be distinguished from the Ocean around, its voice being akin to the roar of the billows that guarded it from foes. It was as it were, strewed with vessels and ornaments of priceless gold and silver, gem-encrusted. And Anjaneya cast his wondering eyes on that mansion of the lord of the *rakshasas,* resplendent in its wealth, elephants, horses, chariots and warriors; he could not contain himself, but was forced to admit that it was the brightest ornament of the capital. He drew near the gates searching most carefully, through the residences of the *rakshasas,* the gardens that surrounded them and the terraces and towers that crowned them, without the slightest fear of trepidation.

Having completed his search through the mansions of the prominent *rakshasas* and the sons and brothers of Ravana located within the outer courts, Hanuman then most carefully went through the palaces of Prahasta, Mahaparsva, Kumbhakarna, Vibhishana, Mahodara, Virupaksha, Vidyujjihva, Vidyunmali, Vajradamshtra, Suka, Sarana, Indrajit, Jambumali, Sumali, Rasmiketu, Suryasatru, Vajrakaya, Dhumraksha, Sampati, Vidyutrupa, Ghana, Vighana, Sukanasa, Vakra, Satha, Vikata, Hrasvakarna, Damshtra, Romasa, Yuddhonmatta, Matta, Dhvajagriva, Hethi, Vidyujjihva (another of the same name), Indrajihva, Hasthimukha, Karala, Pisacha, Sonithaksha and other warriors of note. And he wondered at the wealth and luxury that fell to the lot of those fortunate persons.

Leaving them behind him he came back to the abode of Ravana, and passed through the outer courts to the harem. Fierce-eyed *rakshasas* that guarded the gates there, lay all around in deep sleep.

Some of them stood on guard variously armed with trident, sword and other weapons. Well-equipped troups lay encamped at regular intervals. As if these were not enough, countless *rakshasas* of gigantic stature patrolled the gates and walls in full armour. Horses of deep red and snowy white, fleet as the desert wind were to be found here and there.

Numerous elephants of noble breed roamed proudly over the place, endowed with every perfection, like huge mountains covered with cataracts, or dun clouds in the act of pouring forth their precious life-currents. They were quite enough to deal death and destruction to the enemies' forces; they were more than a match for the well-trained elephants of the foe; they were perfect in every art and device known to the training of elephants; they were fit to be ranged on the battle-ground by the side of the lordly Airavata of Indra; their roar resembled that of surcharged cloud-banks. Myriads of infantry, gaily adorned with rare gold and gems, shone like the morning sun. The palanquins of various designs and unsurpassed beauty, were past count. The eye rested with pleasure on many a curiously fashioned bower, on many a pavilion adorned with the loveliest specimens of the painter's art; perfect imitations of hillocks and mounts fashioned of wood, and pleasure houses, for dalliance during the day and the night, were artistically scattered all over the place. There was many a cage of the rarest workmanship for the peacocks to abide in. Flags and banners were raised aloft everywhere commemorating the wondrous achievements of the *rakshasa* lord. Numerous coffers and treasure-chests were filled to overflowing with pearls, corals, coins and other articles of priceless value. Maruti could not contain his surprise at the sight of that vast mansion of the ten-headed lord of Lanka. It was designed and wrought by architects of the highest intelligence and ability. Lofty as the mount Mandara, it was complete in every variety of bird and beast and rare metals. Like the mount Kailasa on which abides the Lord Mahadeva, its turrets lost themselves in the sky. That capital of *bhutas* and *rakshasas* sowed aloft as it were like a huge cloud of spotless white. Even as the Lord of the day shines in the lustre of his rays, it shone in the splendour of Ravana himself and the brilliance of the rare gems that were to be found in it. Innumerable beds, couches, lounges, and divans, of rarest gold and strange make, settees, seats, chairs, decanters, goblets, cups, flagons, bowls, jugs, jars and plates, were to be seen in endless profusion. It was not over-crowded, but laid out with healthy spaces between. Other places there were with numerous courts and lofty domes. The remains of rare and delicious drinks were to be found there in vessels rich with precious stones. The sweet music of the anklets and waist banks of some maidens dancing in response to the spirit of excitement that liquor had roused in them, fell softly upon the ear mixed with the sound of drums of various shapes and style. In fact, it was the home of the loveliest and the most charming specimens of womanhood; it put to shame the matchless abode of Kubera, the lord of wealth, by its beauty, splendour and magnificence. And Anjaneya made his entry into the palace where Ravana abode.

CHAPTER 7

THE PALACE OF RAVANA

THEN Hanuman the mighty, cast his eyes on the rows of houses that resembled the rain-clouds adorned with flashing lightnings, and long lines of birds. The windows thereof were inlaid with priceless gems and dazzled the eyes from afar. He saw on his way many a building bright with conches, bows, and other instruments of war and many a lofty turret that crowned the palaces below. As for the abode of Ravana himself, it was a perfect and flawless illustration of the highest signs of architecture and house-planning. It was ever bright and brilliant from the rare and countless treasures that were gathered there. It was held in fear and reverence, even like the fanes of gods; such was the terror that Ravana inspired in the hearts of the gods and the demons. He took it by force in battle from his brother Kubera; while the other mansions in the city were fashioned by Visvakarma. But it was Ravana himself who planned and carried out everything, though Maya was known as the creator thereof. And it was a thing that no other can essay. Verily every perfection of art and science connected with the abodes of mortals were to be found there. In due course Maruti did not fail to come upon the Pushpaka-vimana of Ravana in his search for Sita. Of vast proportions, resembling a huge cloud flitting across the sky, it was wrought of pure molten gold and cast a spell on the eyes and hearts of beholders. Of a truth, it was entirely consonant with and befitting the valour and renown of Ravana. One could be excused for believing that the world of the gods, came down into the world of the mortals on a visit in all its splendour and magnificence. It shone in its own splendour of the priceless gems that were wrought into it. Like a lofty mountain peak, it was entirely hid beneath the bright flowers of raré trees and the clouds of dust thereof (hence the name Pushpaka).

Noble dames moved through it like lightnings among cloud-banks. It was borne by lordly swans, and gave one the idea of the flying cars of the happy immortals, in its wealth and luxury. It dazzled the eyes of the beholders in the brilliance of its gems even like mountain peaks veined with many a precious ore, or like the expanse of the heavens in its glory of the planets, the constellations, the moon and the variegated clouds. It was rich with the master-pieces of the painter's art that created upon it, tracts covered with mountains, mountains covered with trees, trees covered with flowers, and flowers covered with tiny petals. (The commentator Tilaka takes it that the mountains and the trees were fashioned of gold and gems and not painted. For, it is said that numerous monkeys gambolled over them. Again the car Pushpaka took any shape large or small that its master desired). The snow-white mansions, pools paved with lovely flowers, lotuses with fine soft filaments and groves, forests and woods, were painted on it. Brilliant in the splendour of its gems, it overshadowed the loftiest mansions in Lanka.

You can come within it upon swans, peacocks and other birds with beaks and legs of coral, and with body fashioned of silver and inlaid with diamonds, emeralds, sapphires and other precious stones. Other birds were there of gold and coral with flower-soft feathers and wings that adjusted themselves to the movements, and of a loveliness that inspired passion in the hearts of the beholders; serpents of every known variety were fashioned of gold, silver and gems. Horses of noble breed were to be found there, crowned with every perfection, with forms and movements appropriate to the species they belonged to. Elephants of lofty stature were so constructed as to disport themselves in the deep pools and covered with the soft pollen of the lotuses to shower the petals of the dark lily with its trunks. And there was an image of Mahalakshmi, most skilfully fashioned. The Mother of the universe held a golden lotus in one of her auspicious hands; while the elephants mentioned above, poured over her, the pure and lympid waters of coronation. Maruti went round that most perfect aircraft and could never admire it enough. Like a lofty tree it rose on view in all its glory of lovely flowers and leaves from which there wafted afar, a sweet odour. Or like a huge mountain with its vast caverns and beautiful forests, the season of rain and mist and just entering the spring with its flowers, fruits and shoots. Held in reverence by all, and guarded with sleepless care by Ravana himself, that Lanka held no place too secret for Hanuman to search; but his heart sank within himself with disappointment. He came not upon Janaki, ever centred with heart whole-devotion, in the countless perfections of Ramachandra, ever absorbed in contemplation of himself and rightly adored by all beings.

Maruti was no ordinary person; to him the self and the Great Self had no mysteries; his feet were firmly planted on the path of perfection; he was veritably a great soul; he had the power to see for himself directly and clearly what others could not. So he almost lost heart and formed plan upon plan for coming upon Sita whom he failed to locate, though he searched Lanka most carefully from end to end.

CHAPTER 8

THE CAR PUSHPAKA

AND in the midst of the palace of Ravana, Hanuman beheld the lofty aircraft inlaid with gems and ornamented with birds fashioned of molten gold. It was practically boundless and peerless. Visvakarma, the architect of the gods, created it and congratulated himself. "Nay, this, verily, is the best, the very best of all my art." There was no place above or below, where its course was not possible. Being divine in its nature, it stood in the sky without touching the ground.

Of a truth, it looked like a beacon to indicate the path of the sun. So radiant was it. Every design on it was most carefully and elaborately wrought. The gems with which it was inlaid, were of peerless perfection. The very cars of the gods could not boast of the wonders it held. In short, everything about it was rare and priceless. Kubera, the Lord of wealth had it first; and Ravana underwent a course of stern *tapas* for ten thousand years at the holy spot of Gokarna to win the favour of Brahma. Endowed with that might, he defeated Kubera his brother in battle and wrested from him, this wonderful conveyance. It read the unspoken wishes of its lord and coursed accordingly with the speed of wind. Many mansions it held for rare form and quality. It was the pattern for everything charming and lovely on earth. Nothing can bar its way. Pure and sacred like the hermitages of the Great Ones, the home of every luxury and enjoyment even like the world of gods won by spotless merit, rich in everything that the heart could desire, even like the palaces of those who found the favour in the eyes of Mahalakshmi, radiant like the abodes of the just who won for themselves the immortal fame by their rare and wondrous achievements, it shone on matchless splendour like the Amaravati of Indra, ever praised by the worlds; and endowed with everything that could charm the heart of man, sweet music, dance, lovely shapes and of perfect womanhood. It stood aloft in mid sky, latent with matchless speed. Like a lofty mountain peak with curious trees and veined with priceless ore, it had endless courts and was clean and spotless, even like the autumnal moon. It was dotted with many a statue fashioned like *rakshasas* coursing through the sky with huge bodies and faces adorned with ear-rings and like elementals with round, straight and slanting eyes wide open. It was more beautiful than spring itself in its dense forests covered with shoots, flowers and fruits of every hue, rivers, streams, pools, zephyrs, bees, peacocks, cuckoos, deer, lovely men and women that are ever associated with that most charming of seasons. And Hanuman the monkey-warrior beheld with boundless surprise the car Pushpaka that owned Ravana as its master.

CHAPTER 9

THE HAREM

AND in the centre of that car Maruti came upon a rare palace. It was the residence of Ravana. Its length was one full *yojana* and it was half *yojana* broad. It was adorned with many a tower and turret and terrace. Maruti sought for Janaki of matchless beauty all over the palace and passing through the lovely mansions of the *rakshasas* reached the palace of Ravana itself. Lofty elephants of the noblest breed stood at the gates with three and four tusks. Armed guards patrolled around it at regular intervals. They were the sleeping apartments of the queens of Ravana and of the princess who were torn from the homes and the arms of innumerable kings who went down before Ravana in his tour of conquest around the worlds. That abode of the *rakshasa*-lord, reminded one of the great seas teeming with sharks, whales, leviathens and other huge monsters of the deep, ever vexed with storms, that tossed the billows aloft like huge mountains. It was filled with *rakshasas* of frightful shape and blinding splendour. The palace of Ravana was the concentration of the wealth and the magnificence of Kubera, the lord of riches, and Indra the ruler of the gods, and the blinding radiance of Garuda, the thrice fortunate bearer of the Great Father. In the houses of the *Rakshasas* that dwelt in Lanka, you can feast your eyes upon everything rare and priceless that the palaces of Kubera, Yama, Varuna and the other regents of the worlds held; nay, even upon objects that were foreign to them.

In the far past Visvakarma fashioned it in the world of the gods for the use of Brahma. Later on Kubera won the heart of his grandsire by his stern *tapas* and devotion and obtained it as a reward. Lastly Ravana defeated in battle his brother Kubera and wrested it from him as the prize of valour.

Statues of wolves were sculptured on the pillars curiously fashioned of gold and silver. That car shone as it were in its splendour; its crest was lost in the sky, even like the mountains, Meru and Mandara. Tiny pavilions, lodges, and kiosks of auspicious shapes were skilfully hid from view here and there. The aerial car reduced to pale insignificance, the radiance of the Lord of day and fire, this was the masterpiece in every way of the countless creations of Visvakarma.

Lofty terraces with staircases of gold, windows of crystal gold and other rare materials, large gateways, platforms inlaid with emeralds and other rare gems, floors adorned with intricate mosaics of coral, priceless pearls and matchless diamonds, sandal paste of rare perfume and red like the morning sun, the car Pushpaka dazzled the eyes with the blinding splendour of the Lord of the day as he came out through the gates of the rising mountain. And Anjaneya went up into it, intent upon his search for the lady Sita. (The *Ratnasastra* tells us that the genuine emeralds are milk blue; that is what Agastya believes. *Mahanila,* or the Great emerald is found in Ceylon).

The sweet fragrance that arose from the dining saloons rich with rare foods, drinks and other refreshments, was borne by the joyful breeze far and wide. Anjaneya passed through the portals of the lofty car, even as the Lord of air in his visit to the world of mortals. Like the pleasant welcome that his dear kinsmen extend to one of them who returns after a long sojourn in far away lands, the fragrance that was borne from the dining halls of Ravana seemed to invite Anjaneya to pay a visit to the refectory. And Anjaneya guided by it beheld the dining saloons of Ravana. It was dear to the heart of the *rakshasa*-king even like his favourite queens. The steps and stairs were inlaid with precious stones. Yet other spots were ornamented with crystal and ivory; yet other places were adorned with pillars and columns inlaid with gold and silver. Yet other lofty pillars covered with curious designs and fretwork were planned smooth and gave one the idea that the car Pushpaka spread its wings aloft, for an aerial flight. The floor was covered with thick and priceless carpets on which were worked the globe with its mountains, rivers, valleys, meadows, forests, towns and villages. So one could be excused for believing that the car was a miniature of the domains ruled over by the kings and emperors on earth.

Birds of rare hue and plumage called to one another gaily in the exuberance of their spirits. Sandal, aloes, rose water, saffron, athar and other rare scents assailed the senses in a most pleasant way. Priceless seats covered with more priceless covers were scattered about. Here and there he came upon places blackened with the smoke of aloes. Yet other places were spotlessly white like lordly swans. Flowers of every hue and shape covered the floor everywhere. Like the faultless Kamadhenu,the divine cow of Vasishta, that car left nothing to be desired. It permeated one's innermost self with boundless joy; it chased away the gloom and sorrow; it brought brightness and radiance to a man's presence and placed within his reach every kind of wealth and luxury. It afforded to the senses their dearest delights and looked after one with motherly care and love.

Anjaneya feasted his eyes with its wonders and cried in admiration "Is this the mansion of the great gods which one reaches by the merits of the performing of the vedic rites. Or, is it the very world of Brahma himself, that great souls attain to, after countless ages of stern *tapas.*" And he stood there utterly dazed and in pleasant confusion.

Columns of gold rose aloft, lighted by lamps of precious stones with spotless wicks and crystal oil. The light so pleasant to the eye, so steady and motionless reminded him of the gambling saloons, where green horns, fleeced bare by veterans were planning deeply about asking their revenge and recovering their losses. Countless lamps chased away gloom and darkness and made it bright as day; the natural radiance and glory that played about the form of Ravana whose fame extended to the utter-most confines of the worlds, and struck down terror into the hearts of every one upon whose ears fell that dread name, though he was no whit behind others in stern *tapas,* deep erudition, perfect knowledge of the *Vedas* and *vedantas* and faultless performance of the duties of his caste and order; the brilliance of the ornaments that graced the forms of his women — all these extorted from Hanuman the exclamation and doubt "This car verily is on flames."

On priceless carpets and rugs spread on the floor, there reclined many a lovely maiden of faultless perfection dressed in gay and beautiful colours and garlands of curious workmanship. They fancied various styles and guises and weary and fatigued with having enjoyed themselves with their lord, fell under the potent influence of drink. The tingle of ornaments that filled the harem during the day, with sweet music was conspicuously silent at midnight, when its inhabitants lay in deep sleep; and Maruti was surprised into exclaiming "Is this a deep pool, lovely at night with sleeping swans and the bees that cluster over them." Those ladies were clasped in the arms of sleep with lips closed firmly hiding from view the rows of pearly teeth, and the long and curved eye-lashes lightly resting on the lids, while the sweet fragrance of their breath filled the place like odour of blown lotuses. (Women are of four kinds and these are the highest, known as Padmini. Sleeping with closed lips and calm features, motionless limbs, soft breath and fragrant, absence of senseless prattle during dreams, characterise the perfect women. Sleeping with teeth lightly exposed, eyes half open, unpleasant snore and foul breath indicate the lowest of the species).

Even as lovely lotuses that are roused to consciousness by the sweet touch of the Lord of the day, and having filled the world with delight, sink into deep sleep with their petal eyes gently closed when their lord and lover has gone away from them beyond the setting mountains, those noble dames rose before their lord in the morning and waited for the first glance of love and affection to fall upon them from their lord; and having spent the day in his sweet company, they sink into deep sleep of exhaustion after him.

Their garments were in sweet disorder during deep sleep and Anjaneya though he was privileged to behold them in their privacy, was in no wise disturbed in his serenity; his heart as pure and unsullied as ever; nay, his splendour and brilliance increased apace. Said to himself, "These patterns of perfect womanhood remind me in their lovely faces, of lotuses in a calm pool in their beauty, hue and fragrance, that charm the senses. I have not the slightest doubt that the bees, intoxicated with too frequent draughts of honey will mistake them for blown flowers and pay frequent visits to them.

Like the blue clear vaults of the autumnal sky paved with stars shone that harem of Ravana filled with those matchless women in deep sleep with their limbs flashing like lightning and their faces crowned with black sweet curls like the dark clouds on the horizon. And Ravana sleeping among them resembled the Full Moon in all her splendour in the midst of the countless stars. Anjaneya was struck dumb with wonder at the sight of those ladies of Ravana who appeared to him like the just and righteous souls, who, having attained through their matchless merit to the height of the rulers of the star worlds, wane after countless eternities in their splendour and fall upon the earth through the strength of the slight remnant of spiritual greatness that yet remained to them. Like the great star clusters of auspicious radiance, those ladies irradiated the space around with their beauty, splendour and glory.

Their garland of flowers and necklaces of gems were in sweet disorder through too frequent potations, gay sports and sweet daliance with their lord; their ornaments were displaced largely; fatigue overcame them; their faces gradually lost their freshness and they slept the sleep of the just and the innocent.

The *tilaka* that adorned the foreheads of some noble dames were no longer there; the anklets of yet others slipped away; the strings of pearls that adorned others lay by their side. Overcome with the exhaustion that follows indulgence over much in the delights of love, those girls lay in deep unconsciousness with their necklaces and waistbands broken and their garments loose. And they resembled mares who having gone through a very long course, rolled over and over on the ground to throw off their weariness and fatigue. Some were adorned with beautiful ear-rings; the garlands of others were faded and broken. Disporting themselves with Ravana of mighty arms, they looked like the lovely creepers flower-clad, trampled under the feet of maddened elephants. The ropes of pearls that shone like the sun and the moon between the breasts of some, resembled lordly swans on a pool. The strings of emeralds that graced the shoulders of others deluded one into the belief that they were swans and the golden chord that held gems together were rows of *chakravakas*.

The hips of those ladies were very much like the mounts of sand around the clear crystal waters of the autumnal streams; their garlands were the swans that sail over them; their swelling breasts were the *chakravakas;* their eyes were the dark lillies; their lips were the tender shoots; their feet were the lotuses; their necks were the shells; their eyes were the fish that darted here and there; their navels were the sailing eddies; the splendour of their bodies that proclaimed them as the perfection of their sect was the banks; their gay acts of daliance were the crocodiles; their ornaments were the blown lotuses; and the tinkling anklets were the buds.

The priceless ornaments that graced the soft limbs and breasts of some resembled the lovers that would not have departed from their mistresses even during sleep. The garments of some rested their fringes on the faces of their owners whose breath lightly disturbed them now and then. And as they rose and fell they looked like creepers of varied hues. The sweet fragrant breath of some of the sleeping beauties there stirred their ear-rings lightly. It needs no saying that their breath was ever sweet; and it was rendered yet more sweet and fragrant through the honey mixed with sugar as it blew gently upon Ravana. Others were sunk in utter unconsciousness through drink and sleep; and naturally mistook the faces of their friends that lay by them for that of their lord Ravana and kissed it often and often in the strength of their passion; and those thus kissed mistook her for their lord through their deep love for him, and they returned it with tenfold ardour. Thus, through the strength of their love to Ravana, those ladies delighted themselves with one another through sweet music.

Some there slept, with no other pillows but their arms graced with ornaments; others made a pillow of their wraps; one of them lay with her head on the breast of another through drink and deep attachment; and another slept with her head laid on the shoulders of the former. There lay a gentle lady with her head resting on the lap of her friend; and on her shoulders lay the heads of two others in the sleep of weariness. Their thighs, sides, hips, loins and other limbs were in inextricable confusion. It gave one the idea of countless garlands of flowers; their shapely arms, the string that ran through them; and their heads, the lovely buds clustered with the sweet curls that lightly rested upon them even as intoxicated bees.

That harem of the ladies of Ravana was even like a flower-garden in spring. Their arms were the creepers; their shoulders were stalks; their fingers were the shoots; the claps of their garments were the flower bunches; their black curling hair were the bees; their sweet fragrant breath was the southern breeze. And with their limbs thrown over others in the unconsciousness of sleep, they resembled countless creepers blown into a heap by the strong wind, and it was almost impossible for one to distinguish the limbs and ornaments of each of them. The lights in the lamps of diamonds, rubies, emeralds and sapphires, glowed with a steady radiance on columns of precious stones as if they were lovers stealthily gazing on with unwinking eyes at the ladies of Ravana, in their graceful disorder of garments and ornaments under the influence of drink, fatigue and sleep when he was deep in the arms of Morpheus, since they could never dream of doing it when he was awake. Among them there were maidens from the homes of royal sages, the *pitris, daityas, gandharvas* and *rakshasa,* who came to him of their own accord for very love. Others were won by him as the prize of victory over their kinsmen who were laid low in the battle by the warlike *rakshasa* king. Others were attracted to him by his beauty's splendour, wealth, and valour and loved him with deep passion. But there was none who was bound to him only by ribands of force and prowess; for, each and every one of them lost their heart to him,except the lady Janaki; the noblest gem on the crown of womanhood, every one there knew no other lover from their birth, no wife of another was to be found in the group. Nor was there in their midst any one who was not of noble ancestry, and came of the highest class of womanhood, the *padmini.* Nor was there among them one whom nature had not endowed with every auspicious mark and sign. Nor was there among them, one whom ornaments and garments did not vie with one another to grace and adorn. Nor was there among them, one who attended upon Ravana and did not meet his lightest wishes with a most loving heart. Nor was there among them who was not his mate in health, strength, vigour and hardihood. Nor was there among them one who did not find favour in his eyes.

Hanuman, though of mighty intellect had the twist in his brain, probably through his subhuman nature, and exclaimed "Ravana committed the mistake of his life when he abducted the lady Sita after Rama had made her his wife. He ought to have done it before, as he did with these countless maidens. Then danger and death will not hang over his head as they do now. (Here Govindaraja the prince of commentator makes a slip. "Ravana might lead a peaceful and happy life if he had married Sita in due course, instead of taking her away by force. He wrongs greatly and unjustly that most devoted servant of Rama. In fact Maruti was no whit behind his master in sweet mercy, or sympathy or compassion, even towards the bitterest of his enemies. His heart went out towards the noble ladies he found in the harem, over whom brooded the terrible curse of widowhood in the near future, when Rama would deal out first vengeance for the crime of abducting the wife of another." As an instance of the fertility and resource of the commentators of old, I give here some other explanations of the passage by another of them, Mahesa Tirtha by name. 1. It would be most fitting if my lord and king Sugriva wrested from the arms of Ravana, these wives of his, even as the *rakshasa* has kidnapped the lady Sita and placed her here in durance vile. 2. Ravana would have lived his life to some good purpose if he restored Sita to the arms of Raghava and delighted his heart with the sights of their conjugal happiness, even as his wives enjoy with him, the dearest wishes of their hearts. 3. Ravana defeated the kinsmen of these women in open battle and carried them away as the prize of victory. He ought to have done the very same thing in the case of the lady Sita. If he had defeated or slain Rama and Lakshmana when they were in their hermitage, he need not fear vengeance at their hands now. 4. I behold these women in their happy homes in the company of the lord of their heart. It would be the day of my life when I would feast my eyes with the sight of my Mother, the lady Sita in the sweet company of Rama, and would it not be the happiest hour of Sugriva's long life? And it would be the most glorious time that Angada and my other friends who hold on to life only beause their faith in me is unshaken. For, my lord Sugriva has proclaimed "He who comes back to me ere thirty days passed by with the news of the whereabouts of the lady Sita, him will I place by my side. He will share with me my power, my wealth and my delights. He will be next to my heart. Dearer than my life do I hold him." To me falls the lot of finding matchless favour in the eyes of my lord. Then I would have lived my life to some purpose. 5. Verily Rama's heart will know peace, happiness and delight only when I behold the lady Sita alive and happy just as I behold these *rakshasa* ladies. 6. Ravana! you took these women to yourself in the bonds of righteous wedlock. You should have done the very same by the lady Sita too, if you cared to retain your life and power and wealth. 7. If the lady Sita were of the same kind as these women of Ravana, she could not fail to be among these. But she stands by herself in peerless perfection and that is why Ravana has duly honoured by placing her apart.

But an impartial and natural construction of the verse would give us something like the following rendering. Maruti's heart never strayed away from the path of right. So he thought "These wives of Ravana, each and every one of them love him most devotedly. Even so, should the lady Sita feel towards Ravana and have come to him of her own accord, if he was to have length of day, power, wealth and luxury and everything that heart could desire. But she is the wedded wife of Raghava. To her he is the husband, the Guru, nay, the very God. Her life is centred in him, at all times and in all conditions. Then and then alone would Ravana be free from the dread phantom of his fear, danger and sorrow. Now his heart will be an eternal stranger to scrutiny and calm, in that, he has torn the lady Sita from the arms of her beloved and forced her to love him in spite of the disgust and repugnance that fills her soul at the very sight of him. Verily his hour has come, and his place will be empty in his heart."

All these glorious sights and scenes wrung from Maruti the words "One could search this vast universe from end to end and through and through and not come upon any one who could even approach the lady Sita in the virtues of perfect womanhood. Now this Ravana comes of the mighty and sacred line of Brahma, the Fashioner of the Worlds. Yet he has defiled himself with the heinous sin of having laid ungodly hands upon her." Sorrow and pity unspeakable filled his heart, and he said to himself "Nay, Nay, it would be a sin to think that the spotless purity of the lady Sita could ever be sullied at any time and under any circumstance. For, it would consume to nothing the very Lord of fire."

I, but dishonoured myself by allowing my heart even to harbour this lightest of suspicions about her." (Here the commentators fall foul with one another, for, Govindaraja reads the verse to mean "Maruti's heart was filled with deep remorse, because he dared to compare even in thought the mother of mercy, the fountain of everything good and great to the ordinary *rakshasa* women. Or he sighed at the thought of Ravana whose life and power and happiness were drawing near through the great wrong he had done to Rama."

Tilaka thinks otherwise: "Sita is the paragon of wifely devotion, the incarnation of everything noble, and auspicious; and Ravana of boundless wealth and valour, yet sank so low as to disguise himself as a mendicant and spirit her away. It would have saved him this foul act if Sita had of her own accord been attracted to him by his wealth and virtue. But also he made his own bed of infamy and death and must even lie upon it).

CHAPTER 10

RAVANA'S HAREM *(Continued)*

MARUTI came upon a couch of crystals inlaid with gems even like the bed of the lord of the celestials. All around it were arranged many seats and lounges wrought of emeralds and sapphires, chased with gold and ivory and covered with priceless carpets and rugs. (As an instance of the conflicting notions of commentators we may here note that Govindaraja takes these for foot-stools and Tilaka for the lounges of Ravana's wife).

On one side of it there stood a huge umbrella of spotless white like the moon in her full, decorated with garlands of pearls and ropes of gems. That bed of Ravana fashioned of pure molten gold of one thousand and eight carats, lighted the place even like the noonday sun.

It was hung with festoons of Asoka and other flowers. Flower-soft skins of rare animals, priceless shawls, rugs and coverlets, feather beds, were to be found on it. It hid under clouds of flowers of various hue. It was redolent of saffron, musk, athar, aloes, sandal, civet and other rare perfumes. Countless maidens with chowries in their hands stood along its edges, wrought of gold and gem and curiously fashioned as to waft soft breezes at all times.

And upon it the dread Lord of Lanka lay asleep, dark of hue even like the surcharged rain cloud of winter. His arms were strong, stout, and round like the graceful trunks of elephants; his eyes were red like the blazing flames; his face was adorned with ear-rings blazing like the sun. The priceless garment of gold that he wore, shone like a flash of lightning playing amongst dark cloud-banks.

The crimson sandal paste of rare make that adorned his huge chest and arms blowed like a red cloud at sunset with chained lightning playing through it. He could take any form at will; and he lay there as beautiful and fascinating as the God of Love, to steal the hearts of his wives. He was lost in deep sleep, the result of long and varied daliance and drink.

Maruti beheld Ravana in his repose, the beloved lord of the *rakshasa* ladies and the dispenser of everything great and good and glorious to his countless subjects and was betrayed into an exclamation, "It is verily, the lordly mountain Mandara in deep sleep with its trees, bushes and woods and rivers?" But unspeakable grief almost brought tears to his eyes at the sight of Ravana who reclined there breathing regularly and heavily like a huge serpent hissing forth in ungovernable wrath. "Alas! what heinous sin have I been guilty of in that my eyes rested upon the foul abductor of the lady Janaki, even before I could bless my eyes with a sight of her whom I have sought for, and wide." He drew back apace as if he was unable to face a dreadful elemental or some fierce beast of prey; for, said he to himself, It ill becomes me to stay near this vile sinner." Then he got up a platform near it and again gazed steadily at Ravana.

The huge bed looked like a mountain torrent in the rains hid beneath the herds of dun elephants in rut, as Ravana lay there in the arms of sleep with his mighty shoulders like the trunks of elephants and gracefully adorned with sandal paste of rare perfume. For, his graceful arms were very long and reached his knees like the banners of Indra, raised in honour of the Lord of Heaven. Like the pillars of smothered iron or steel, beaten into graceful shape, they were unconceivably hard and gradually tapered like the trunks of elephants. They were perfectly similar, most mighty, with well-knit joints and graced with perfectly formed fingers, toes and nails. His hands lay by his side, like two huge five-headed serpents in repose, its fingers adorned with costly rings. His shoulders covered with gold armlets, were covered with the scars when they challenged the elephant of Indra and broke off its tusks, it bore the marks of his mighty battle with Vishnu himself, when his dread Chakra inflicted, but deep wounds thereon. Verily they shone like countless full-moons on a black sky.

They were adorned with curious designs worked in sandal paste, sweet, cool, fragrant and red like the blood of harts. In fact they were saturated with rare perfumes: noble ladies vied with one another in massaging them; they were the holy terror of the *yakshas,* the *gandharvas,* the *devas,* the *asuras* and other denizens of the high world. Maruti beheld those powerful arms flung in deep sleep that reminded him of vast pythons in the midst of the mountain Mandara, hissing in wrath, and lying torpid after the heavy meal of beasts and birds. In fact the huge mountainous bulk of Ravana was fitly adorned with those arms of perfect form and shape even like two lofty peaks. (So we gather that Ravana had but one head and two arms, when he was in his harem and in all the charm and beauty of countless cupids. On rare occasions of state and war, he appeared with ten heads and twice ten arms, a terrible sight indeed).

The breath that issued from him filled that vast sleeping saloon with the fragrance of the essences of fruits and flowers, the variety of food and drinks rare and costly. His crown of gold slipped a little one side, heavy with priceless gems and pearls. The sheen of his ear-rings brightened up his face all over. His vast broad and mighty chest was adorned with curious design in sandal paste. Garlands and ropes of pearls and gems lay upon it. His upper garments of silk and gold were slightly disordered. The cloth of gold that he wore on his loins blinded the eyes with its lustre. With flaming eyes, and huge stalk like a hill of black pulse, he lay asleep there hissing like a huge serpent or like a mighty elephant in deep sleep on the rolling waters of Ganges. The vast hall was filled with noon-day radiance from the bright lights of the countless lamps of precious stones on the tops of golden columns.

And it was thus that Maruti beheld Ravana, and his favourite ladies that lay at his feet all around in deep sleep. His body resembled a cloud through which flashed lightnings, casting a blinding radiance all around. Those favourites of his shone in the splendour of their countenance that put to shame the moon in its full. They wore earrings of rare designs, and garlands that never faded. Some of them charmed away the heart of Ravana by their skill in song and dance and were richly rewarded by him with priceless ornaments; and there, they lay upon his arms and breast and lap, overcome with resistless sleep in the midst of their daliance. Some rested their fair heads upon their shapely arms adorned with ornaments and gems; and so it was that the sheen of their armlets ran into that of their earrings and blazed fiercely. Verily that hall resembled the blue vaults of heaven with its lovely faces like the moon and their ear-rings that resembled like star clusters. In the pride of their youth and vigour they indulged themselves long with Ravana and fell asleep as they were.

One of them, a vision of loveliness was an expert in the art of dance and gesticulation; and she won the heart of her lord with her graceful movements and skilful exposition of the emotions and fell asleep, her arms crystallised in the perfect poise of movements.

Another of them, a paragon of beauty compelled the admiration of Ravana by her peerless proficiency on the *vina* and fell asleep clasping it in her arms. She looked like a graceful lotus-stalk in its beauty of leaf and flower borne on the bosom of a torrent and twined round a canoe that came upon accidentally in its course. Another fell asleep, her arms clasped fondly round a *madduka* (a kind of drum) resembling a mother with her darling babe on her hip. Another lay with her arms thrown round a *pataha* (something like the modern *kanjira*) as if she was the wife who was united to the lord of her heart after a long long separation. Another lay with a flute clasped firmly between her breasts, as if she sought long and ardently for a chance to embrace her beloved and came upon him all unaware in sweet privacy.

Yet another slept with her arms fondly cast round a *vipanchi* (a kind of *vina* with seven strings) as if she was in her own rooms in absolute privacy; she was an expert dancer and her voice was soft and low. Another clasped to her breast a *mridanga* (a small drum) and sleep overcame her; her eyes were dim with intoxication and moved over so slightly; her limbs were well-shaped and soft and smooth like a creeper made of gold. One of her friends, thin of waist fell, under the influence of wine and lay asleep with a *panava*(a kind of drum) tightly clasped between her planks and arms.

There was a lovely maiden who fell asleep with one arm round a *dindima*(something like the modern *tabela* of the north) and firmly clasped to her breast its fellow in the crook of the other arm, even like a wife who embraced fondly her husband and babe at the same time. One of her mates fell asleep with an *adambara*(a small war drum) between her breasts.

Yonder reclined another vision of loveliness with a gemmed jug upturned for a pillow; the remains of sandal paste mixed with saffron, trickled from it rightly over her limbs and reminded Maruti of a garland sprinkled with water against the summer heat. Yet another graceful lady fought long and vainly against a fit of drousiness and yet, she had the instinct of a maiden modesty to hide from view, with her flower-soft hands the golden globes of her breasts. It was a curious sight to see another of the wives of Ravana who clasped to her breast, one of her friends, under the impression that she was her lord Ravana himself; for, the treacherous wine cup was too much for her; and so, those noble dames lay asleep all round, their arms thrown fondly over the musical instruments even as they would embrace their beloved.

And as Anjaneya passed them, he came upon a bed most magnificently furnished and standing all apart; and upon it lay in deep sleep a lady who was, as it were perfect womanhood came down into the mortal world. Ornaments of gold, gems and pearls graced her limbs. The splendour of her body irradiated the space around in its hue of molten gold one thousand and eight carats in quality. She was a fitting ornament to that Pushpakavimana like the full-moon in the blue sky in all her radiance and glory. And she was none other than Mandodari, the queen of Ravana whose fame extended to the corners of the world. She was dearer to him than his very life. She was supreme over all his wives and women.

Anjaneya was attracted to her by her wonderful youth, beauty, grace and loveliness. He almost convinced himself that he had after all come upon the object of his quest the lady Sita.

He was overcome with joy and most naturally. He slapped his mighty shoulders and kissed his tail, took short flying leaps and madly gambolled about. He sang to himself, he danced a measure or two, he paced the hall as if treading upon air; he jumped upon the tall columns there and leapt lightly to the ground. And he could not keep himself from being betrayed into all the pranks most natural to his class.

CHAPTER 11

THE DRINKING SALOON

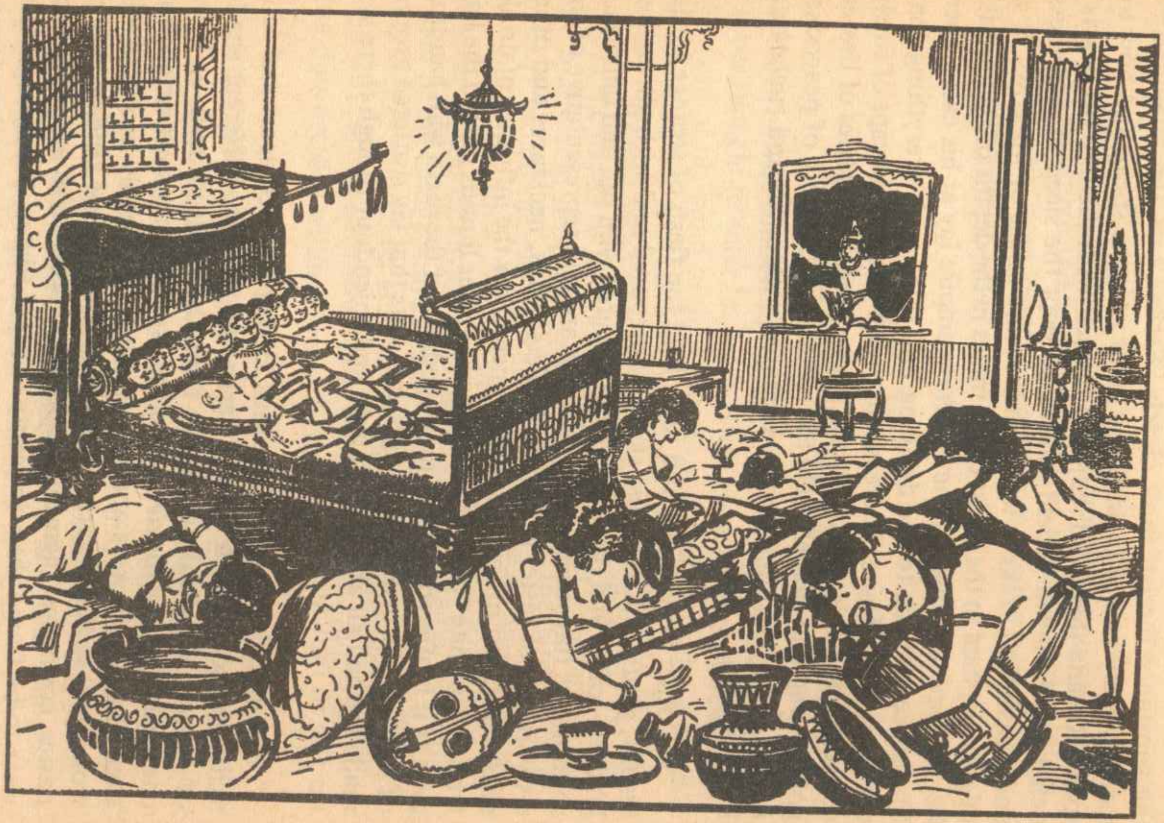
BUT he checked himself in his mad flight and gave a chance for sober thought to enter his brain. Then grave doubts came across the horizon of his mind in thick clouds and dashed to the ground all his too fond hopes of having come upon the daughter of Janaka, and black care and a gloom fell upon him again. "The lady Janaki torn from the hands of her lord Rama, cannot but be aware of his misery; and would she thus sleep like the joyful, the careless, and contented? Would she ever turn her thoughts to even the necessities of life, food and drink. Would she ever even waste a thought in her wildest dreams of any other mate but the lord Rama, be he the very ruler of the Gods? And knows she not that the countless world holds no other who could even stand within measureable distance of Raghava? So this lady is not Sita, but some other noble dame." Having thus decided within himself he renewed his search through the halls.

There he found many a lady as she slept at her ease under the influence of wine and sleep. Some were tired of chess, cowries, bells, dice, dominoes and other parlour games. Sleep, tyrannical and not to be refused, caught them as they were in the midst of a song or a dance. Some fell a victim to the insidious approaches of wine; some lay pillowed upon instruments of music; some lay upon lounges; some upon priceless rugs and carpets — all sunk in the arms of sleep.

Maruti failed to find Sita among them and came back to where Ravana lay asleep. His wives never had enough of praising their lord's beauty and excellences of character with deep devotion. There was none of them who was not a skilful singer and expounder of the substance thereof most clearly. Perfect tact and adaptability marked every one of them. They knew when to speak and how to speak. Ravana their lord, enjoyed himself with them to his hearts' delight and Maruti beheld him as he slept the sleep of weariness and exhaustion. Like a lordly bull in the midst of his cows or a mighty elephant in the midst of his mates in the depths of the forests, he, the lord and ruler of the *rakshasa* empire lay at his ease. Then Maruti came back to the drinking hall filled with everything that the heart could desire. There lay all over it heaps and heaps of finely cooked beef, venison mutton and bacon. Countless plates of beaten gold, broad and shapely held the remains of the flesh of peacocks, fowls, deer, porcupine, boar, prepared with curds and *ruchaka*(a kind of salt).

Yet other bowls, jars and jugs, held the flesh of strange birds, bisons, goats and fish most skilfully prepared and with all various knickers, cakes and pastes. Pickles flavoured with salt and tamarind; condiments flavoured with white mustard and representative of the six varieties of taste; garlands, anklets, rings, necklaces and other ornaments, cast off by men and women under the influence of drink; fruits of infinite variety preserved in various liquids graced the hall even as if it offered worship to the goddess of the earth with handfuls of flowers. The beds and lounges and seats that lay scattered around made the hall all ablaze with light and splendour though there was no fire to indicate it.

Maruti beheld flesh of various kinds preserved apart and most skilfully cooked with curious variety by experts. Different shades of *Varuni,* the drink that arose from the ocean of milk as it was churned of old by the *devas* and the *asuras;* liquors extracted from sugar, honey, flowers and fruits; drinks artificially prepared with wonderful skill and variety; and every imaginable kind of washes, pastes, cosmetics, pigments, lotions and other toilet appertainances were to be found there in plenty. Grapes, dates, palm, sugarcane, jaggery, cocoanut, beehives, *Madhuka* and other articles afforded scope for the skill and originality of arts in the extraction of liquors and essences even as thousands of years ago. The ground was strewn with vessels of gold and crystal to hold food and drink of various



shapes, size, design and fancy work. There were huge jars and jugs of gold and silver in which were drawn ready for use, rare drinks. Other vessels there were — cups, flagons, bowls, goblets and such like for the liquors to pass round and they were fashioned of gold and silver encrusted with gems. Some vessels had never been touched at all; some were half full; some were empty. Here lay the remains of various kinds of prepared food; here lay cakes and confectionery of various sorts; here was seen the drugs of drinks; and here were scattered the broken fragments of priceless vessels; here lay jars, jugs and pots in various spaces of confusion and disorder; here were garlands, chaplets and fruits soaked with water; and there were ranged many couches, sofas, lounges and beds for women to recline upon.

There lay many ladies in deep sleep clasped in each other's arms or covered with the garments of their sleeping friends. Their sweet and soft breath lightly stirred their robes and garlands like the zephyr from the south. It rested then and there on cool sandal, honey, essences, wine, flowers and chaplets of various kinds, rare perfumes and incences and laden with their coolness and fragrance carried them faithfully to the Pushpaka where Ravana lay asleep.

Some of the ladies there, were dark of line; some were white as pure milk; some showed a fine blend of complexion; and some displayed shapely limbs like gold willows. They reminded one of lotuses on a dark pool that closed their eyes in deep slumber at the departure of the Lord of day, as they there in all, abandoned under the influence of weariness, fatigue, sleep and sweet indulgence.

Maruti of blinding radiance, sought from end to end most carefully, the sleeping halls of Ravana, but failed to come upon the lady Janaki. His heart was dark and heavy. "Alas! I have been guilty of the sin of beholding the wives of others during sleep in their privacy with their husband and lord. This will doubtless sully my fair fame and cast a blot upon my stern celibacy. True it is, that my heart is not in the least touched or disturbed by these sights; yet it is black inequity to cast one's eyes even indifferently upon the wives of others." He remained for some time sunk in deep thought. But he shook himself free from it with a mighty effort. "Fie upon my weak-heartedness; it is fatal to the quest upon which

I have come over here." And he resumed his natural keenness of intellect and dauntlessness of heart and set himself to discuss his future plans. "Verily I have been guilty of the sin of casting my eyes upon the wives of Ravana as they lay in the confidence of privacy. But my heart is as pure and spotless as ever. The mind it is that impels the senses to action good and bad, is it not? Now my heart is not dimmed with the slightest flutter of passion. I might have avoided this contingency, were it not for the fact that I could not search for the lady Janaki in a better place where women naturally gather. It is but natural and right that we must search for an object in the midst of its class. Who will ever dream of looking for a woman in a herd of deer? But unfortunate I am, I have left no place unsearched in this vast harem of Ravana; but the lady Janaki is not anywhere in it. The best and fairest types of womanhood of the worlds of the *devas,* the *gandharvas,* and the *nagas,* have passed under my eyes; but the noble wife of Raghava is not among them." He was again beset with anxiety and doubt; but he cast it away from him and coming out of the drinking saloon, he began a fresh search in the sleeping halls of Ravana.

CHAPTER 12

THE DESPAIR OF MARUTI

EVER intent upon finding out where Sita was hid, Maruti passed through the huge dormitary, and beheld many a bower of creepers, pavilions of strange design and villas specially arranged to spend the night in pleasure and happiness. He searched everywhere most carefully; but the lady Sita, the paragon of beauty blessed not his eyes. "Alas! Search as I may, most carefully through the length and breadth of this Lanka, I have not been able to find out where the noble partner of my lord Raghuvira is kept in durance vile. Has she laid violent hands upon herself to escape the torturing grief of separation from her beloved? The daughter of Janaka was a noble ideal for women who wanted to tread the path of perfect wife-hood; she counted nothing dearer than her utter purity of body and soul. Now might it be, that this fierce *rakshasa* pestered her with his foul offers of love and repulsing him with bitters and thorns was cruelly killed by him? Or was she, ever accustomed to feast her eyes and soul with the spheral beauty and loveliness of Raghava, was filled with terror at the sight of her Rakshasi guards, huge, deformed, distorted, repulsive, dull of face and cruel of eyes; and did it prove too much for her?

Now my lord Sugriva is mightier than the mightiest and sterner than Fate. He fixed one full month as the limit of our search; and I have wasted it in idleness and sport in the company of my friends. Here am I with no news of the whereabouts of Sita, or of the strength and weakness and resources of the enemy. How can I dare of taking myself into the presence of my master with an empty hand; I have done my best; the inner apartment of Ravana holds no pin-point that has not come under my careful search. But I beheld his wives one and all of them; and the lady Sita of unshaken fidelity is not among them. It is to no purpose that I crossed this huge waste of waters one hundred *yojanas* broad; it is all in vain that I overcame one after another, the mighty obstacles on my way; it is utterly fruitless that I took a minute shape and searched this town through and through.

Should I return with the brand of failure on my face, my friends the monkey-heroes who are eagerly expecting my return and assuring one another "Hanuman has crossed the sea and reached Lanka by this time. He will return with our dearest hopes fulfilled beyond our expectation. We can afford to cast away from us care and anxiety. No more grief for us; no more misery and danger," they will crowd round me with eager hearts to drink the welcome news from my lips. "Prince of heroes! you have done what the mightiest of us could never dream of doing. Doubtless you have been blessed to come upon the lady Sita. Ravana and his capital hold no secrets for you. Now relate to us in detail the history of your mission and the glorious deed you were privileged to achieve there." Now what shall I reply to them? "Nay my friends! I crossed the sea; I reached Lanka; I searched from end to end; but I failed to come upon the whereabouts of the lady Janakai." Is this the reply that they are waiting for? My friends very cleverly got themselves out of this dangerous mission by acquainting him with their relative strength and prowess. But I kept away from them at the time and was cheated by sweet praise of Jambavan into blabbing forth my might and valour. I have to thank myself for getting into this tight corner and I cannot expect any other to get me out of it. I never stayed to bestow a thought upon the nature of the work I promised to undertake and madly and foolishly passed my word that I would see it done. And fool that I am, I made matters worse by trumpeting forth, when I started. "I will reach Lanka in the twinkling of an eye, even as the arrow shot from the mighty bow of Rama. I will search it from end to end and through and through and come upon the lady Sita. Should I fail, then I will discover her whereabouts though I have to visit the fourteen worlds above and below. Should I fail even then, I will come back to Lanka and bring Ravana in bonds. Should I fail to find him there, I will rouse up the island and fling it here."

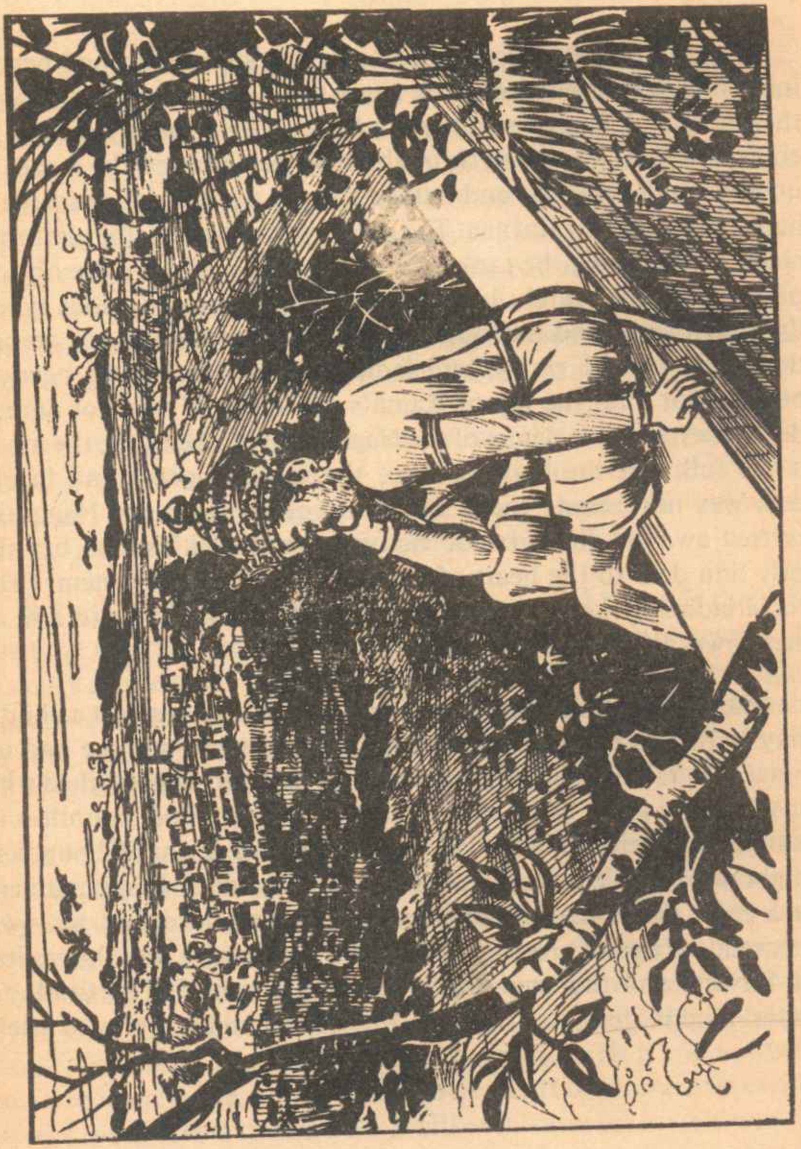
Even so did I boast and play nicely into their hands. And now I have given a free hand to the aged Jambavan who cozened me with sweet praise, and Angada and the other friends who followed suit, to jeer and mock at me as a brainless braggart.

But what if I remain here and never go back? There is the rub when the time for my return passed, my friends the monkeys, will of surety decide that I might have fallen into the sea during my flight through exhaustion, or the *rakshasas* might have been too much for me. And one and all would betake themselves to the halls of the king of death, on the wings of starvation."

He let himself be overpowered by faint-heartedness and despair for a while. Then he got out of it with a mighty effort and cried, "Somebody kick me for the Prince of fools. Care kills a cat and it has nine lives. Gloom and despair lay the axe at the root of success in our plans. Resourcefulness, enthusiasm and a courage that never says "Die; these are the gates that lead to everything great and good". Enthusiasm is the giver of rare happiness; it is what impels a man to achieve the most wonderful deeds. It is what crowns with success every effort of man. So I will even saturate myself with it and try again. I will even search afresh, the land under the rule of Ravana, drinking saloons, flowery bowers, studios, picture galleries, houses of daliance, pavilions, villas, gardens, aerial cars, like Pushpaka, mines, subterranean halls, guardhouses at the cross-roads and the pleasure houses built far away from the mansions for people to disport themselves unrestrained."

He got up some places, got down others; he stood and peered into some spots; he glanced at some as he walked on; he opened the doors and windows lightly, and took a brief survey within; he entered others, he passed through some; he followed the mazes of underground passages; and thus he left not a pin-point unsearched in the vast harem of Ravana. The roads within the fort, the platforms at the cross-roads, the tanks, the pools, all these were the objects of his thorough search; he came upon *rakshasis* of various types, ugly, deformed and hideous; but the lady Janaki was not among them. He beheld *vidyadhara* ladies of marvellous and peerless beauty; but Sita, the joy of Rama's life and soul was not among them. He met noble dames of the Nagaloka, with faces like the moon in its full; but the lady Vaidehi, the ideal of grace and loveliness was not among them. He saw women from the Nagaloka carried away as the prize of victory over their kinsmen; but the lady Sita dear to the heart of Janaka was not among them. (The Naga ladies spoken of before were his wives who came to him of their own accord).

Maruti was the darling son of the lord Vayu; it was but a child's play to him to try to lay hands upon the Lord of day; he had no equal in intellect and perfect counsel; yet his heart was weighed with unspeakable grief, as he beheld gems of womanhood, countless in number, but beheld not the lady Maithili among them. Of boundless might and dauntless heart, yet, the prospect of dark disappointment and cruel death to the hopes of the monkey-lord and his own marvellous feats of crossing the sea and secret entry into the capital of Ravana and thorough search therein, turned his fortitude to water. And he got down from the Pushpaka and fell a prey to grief.



CHAPTER 13

THE DESPAIR OF MARUTI *(Continued)*

THEN he roused himself and with the speed of thought sprang upon the walls of the fort, adorned with sapphires and stood there gazing into the town and beyond. He resembled a flash of lightning playing through dark clouds. His search through the palaces of Ravana having proved fruitless, he fell into the following train of thought. "The commands of my lord Rama are upon my head and eyes; and I have, to my heart's content, gone through this capital of Ravana; but I have failed to come upon the lady Sita of perfect grace, form and beauty. Ponds, pools, tanks, lakes, canals, rivulets, streams, marshy forests, brushwood hills, I have carefully searched them one and all; but alas, the lady Janaki is not there. Now I bethink myself of the pregnant words of Sampati, the mighty vulture 'Sita sits in the house of Ravana. Behold her there.' He saw her with his clear eye and has spoken the truth. But how is it that I did not come upon her.

Dare I whisper unto my soul, that the lady Janaki was dazzled with Ravana of black heart and was driven by passion into his arms? Is she to be spoken in the same breath as other specimens of womanhood? Is she not a scion of the glorious house of Videha, the fountain of *yagas, yajnas* and the science of Brahman (Theosophy)? Was she not born in that sacred town of Mithila, hallowed by the noble presence of Satananda, Yajnavalkya and other God-taught sages? Is she not the daughter of Janaka whom great sages come to as pupils? Was she born of mortal parents like others? Was she not brought into the view of man, by the point of the plough as it tore its course through the field of sacrifice?

It may be that Ravana in his course through the air with Sita in his arms thought "By this time, Rama would have come to the cottage. He would find it empty. Jatayu and others on the way would have told him that I was taking away his wife. Now what will become of me, should he choose to send his shafts after me? There is no place where I can escape it. Know I not what it did with my uncle

Maricha." He might have quaked with mad terror and dropped Sita into the sea. Poor lady! She never had held till then the vast waste of water where billows raised their heads and hissed mountain high, to the mocking skies. Or, it may be that her timid eyes beheld the crocodiles, sharks, whales, sea serpents and other monsters of the deep, as she coursed with the speed of thought, through the sky where abide the celestial hosts, and mad with terror, she lost her senses and slipped from the arms of Ravana into the depths below. Or, it may be that, most delicately nurtured she might have been rudely crushed between the adamantine arms and chest of the mighty Ravana and unable to keep her life-breath in that mad course of his, died of suffocation. Or, it may be that, being the paragon of wifehood she felt herself unspeakably defiled by the touch of another than her lord; and shrinking within herself as it were, she slipped from him as he rose ever higher and higher above the sea. Or, Ravana might have laid violent hands upon her to bend her to his will; and life is not dearer to her than honour. Then Ravana in a fit of mad fury would have made a very pleasant meal of the poor and lovely lady. Or, his queens might have shared her delicate body among themselves in that their malignity was roused by this new arrival who threatened to oust them. Or, she might have filled her heart with the divine image of my lord Rama, his peerless beauty, his dear face that put to shame the moon in her full, and his lovely eyes that reminded one of the bloomy red lotus; deeply absorbed in the contemplation thereof, she might have been filled with utter despair; and all broken in spirit she might have quit that tortured body of hers crying out 'Alas! it is not given to me the joy of beholding him again. Ha Rama! Ha Lakshmana! Ha Ayodhya!'

Fie, Fie upon me; it is crass idiocy to give heed to these foul surmises. It is no great thing for Ravana to take Sita to Lanka without the slightest inconvenience or discomfort to her. Again fear and despair can never be spoken in the same breath, as the Lady Janaki born of a race of warriors and heroes whose hearts were as stern and unassailable even as the Himalayas. Again, Ravana dared not and could not work any harm to the lady Sita, guarded as she is by the all consuming flame of wifely devotion. It is utter folly even to think that Ravana would have gorged himself upon the lovely body of Sita seeing that he had lost his heart to her and made nothing of perpetrating this dreadful sin, absolutely regardless of the consequences, of dangers and destruction to himself, his kingdom, his kith and kin and his people. Nor would his queens ever dare to cast a look of malice or anger at the woman whom they knew was dearer to him than his very life. Nor is it likely that she would have sought death of herself under the misconception that her lord had forgotten her, or that it was beyond his might to lay low his foe, for she of all, knew the innermost nature of Rama, his glory, prowess, strength and valour.

Therefore the lady Sita lives; and she lives right here, in this very island prison. But I am sure that Ravana has hid her away in some utterly secret place, even as a fowler would coop up a rare and most wonderful parrot. Born not of mortal man and woman, from the depths of the sacrificial field brought up and trained by the Royal sage Janaka of the open eye, and united in holy bonds of wedlock to Sri Rama, the lord of the world and endowed with a beauty that cast veil over the eyes and the hearts of beings, even like the great Illusion that works out the will of the causeless cause, the lady Janaki would never of her own accord, seek the arms of that prince of sinners, utterly unmeet in every way. Has Ravana hid her from view beneath the earth? Has she lost her head from terror on the way here and dropped in that sea? Has she fallen a prey to the grief of separation from the lord of her heart?

Now it is unspeakable folly to acquaint Rama with this terrible news, seeing that his heart and soul are centred in her. Illimitable danger and misfortune follow, should I speak the truth; but treachery and rank disloyalty grip me, should I keep it back?

Alas! I am in an impenetrable fault and know not what to do; for, these lines of action are conflicting. What is the very best course I should pursue in this dilemma, that would suit the time, the place and the conditions.

Now take it that I return to Kishkindha from here after an empty quest; then what good comes of it? All this goes to waste, my flight over the sea, entry into Lanka, and my thorough search through the harem; and the finger of scorn would be pointed at me for all time by my lord Rama, Lakshmana and Sugriva and every man, woman and child in the kingdom of Kishkindha.

If I dared to speak to Rama the terrible words "Seek as I may, I never came upon the lady Sita," that would be the last moment of his life; my sharp words would pierce his tender heart most cruelly like poisoned arrows and deprive him of his senses; and his life-breaths would never stay in his body.

And beholding Rama make up his mind to quit his hold on life from unbearable grief, Lakshmana his brother, would not survive him, as he had already given up his body, life and soul to the service of Rama. Of great heart and unclouded intellect, he knows his duty. Bharata, the ideal brother has but to catch the faintest whisper of the dreadful news of the death of Rama and Lakshmana, to follow them to the halls of Yama. And then Satrughna, his twin soul as it were, the very shadow of his self, would be there before him. Then the ladies Kausalya, Sumitra and Kaikeyi would find it hard work to keep their souls in their bodies, deprived at one stroke of their mighty sons, even like unto Regents of the quarters. Now my lord Sugriva is a man of his word. Powerless to return, even in a slight degree, the innumerable benefits he had received at the hands of Sri Rama, his heart would break at the sight of his friend and benefactor die of grief.

Poor Rama, his wife and short-lived queen of the monkey-realms! She had but quite recently turned her back upon misfortune, privations, grief and disgrace; her days and nights were one long prayer to the gods in high, to give a respite to her beloved husband from sorrow and danger. Now that her cup of joy had been dashed rudely from her lips, her partner in joy and sorrow torn from her arms by cruel death, a living death of despised widowhood stretches before her, dark and endless. A model wife she is, and no doubt of it.

My lord Vali is no more in the world of men to bring joy to the heart of his beloved Tara; she walks through life, entuned in death; of peerless intellect and keen, she could not, in the very nature of things survive the shock of being deprived of Vali and Sugriva at one stroke as it were. What of Angada, alas! he is sure, to fall a victim to untimely death, orphaned of father and mother, deprived of his uncle who was to him a second father, the boy will not fail to overtake them. The countless monkeys all over the world, that won his sway, would feel themselves utterly adrift, now that their rulers, their very hold upon life, as it were, and their hopes hereafter, were gathered to dust, would blow their brains with hard adamantine fists. Honoured beyond their expectations by their lord and master with sweet words, rewards, presents and distinctions, the monkey-lords would never bring themselves to live a life of insignificance. After his death, they would never dream of disporting themselves at their ease, in their mansions, forests, groves, woods and mountain slopes, consumed with grief at the dread fate that befell their lord Sugriva; his ministers and councillors, their wives, their children, their kith and kin would hurl themselves from lofty mountain peaks. Or they would do away with themselves through poison, or fire, or starvation, or the rope or weapons. In short, my presence among them would be the signal for shrieks, yells, howls, lamentations and dreadful uproar. The noble line of Ikshvaku, would be but a name upon earth; and the world would know no more of the race of monkeys. Thus my wretched self can never dream of going back to Kishkindha and cast my deadly shadow over all creations. And how shall I muster up heart to stand in the noble presence of my master after a barren quest?

But what if I stay away here? Rama and Lakshmana of righteous souls and mighty arms; and the countless monkey-heroes, whose eyes are ever turned upon the path that would bring me back to them, would gladden themselves by the thought "Now Maruti, our friend and saviour would return from his mission all successful". That hope would keep them alive and happy. I think it best, that I adapt the life of the hermit in these wooded forests where water, fruit and root are plentiful and live upon such sustenance as falls within my reach of itself. Or, I will build up a huge fire and seek peace and repose in its arms. Or, I will hide myself for ever in the uttermost depths of the ocean. Or, I will lay myself down and prepare to quit this body of mine so utterly useless. Then, it would be extremely fortunate for me, if beasts and birds should prey upon it; for, the sages speak very high of such a departure from this world.

This night has begun well for me. At first I won a glorious victory over the guardian deity of Lanka. Then the Lord of night aided me most manfully. I deemed, nay, almost concluded that this night of all nights would be most gloriously known for all times and through all worlds as the night that helped Maruti in his noble quest, as the night when Maruti came upon the lady Janaki. But woe is me! all these hopes have crumbled into dust since the lady Sita has not blessed my eyes with a sight of her noble self. I will never go back to my friends if I do not find the whereabouts of Sita. I will pass the remaining days of life as a recluse and wanderer through woods and forests. For, should I go to them with empty hands, my long expected friend and my prince Angada would die of grief and disappointment. So if I die, misfortunes and evil illimitable would follow; but if I keep my hold upon life, may be that at some distant day or other, peace and happiness will bless my effort. So I decide that it is best I live."

Having taken counsel with himself in this wise, Maruti failed even then to shake off the gloom that weighed him down. "Or, would this be better? I will wring the neck of this wretch of a king. Though it were barren of any other result, it might be fit vengeance for the foul crime he had perpetrated. Or even as the priest offers the sacrificial animal to the God of fire as sweet into his nostrils, shall I bind this heavy sinner in chains, spirit him over the broad sea and fling him like a heap of sodden old clothing at the feet of my lord Rama."

Yet, grief and care gripped his heart fiercely; and he again said to himself: "Now I will go through and through this island, again and again, times out of count, until I find the whereabouts of the lady Sita. Or what if I base myself upon the words of Sampati, so clear, so straight and so convincing : 'Sita is there, pining away in lonely grief in Lanka. Behold! and bring over Raghava here'. Alas! that is a most dangerous experiment. For, should I fail to take him to his beloved, he will reduce to ashes, the whole race of monkeys. So I go back to my old proposal to stay here; and with my senses and mind under perfect control seek death through fasting. Alas! that the myriads of monkeys over the world should perish through the ill-luck and folly of my single self.

He cast his eyes around and cried. "Somebody kick me for a fool, the prince of fools, from here to the ends of earth. Verily, I have taken leave of my senses. Yonder rises the vast grove of *asoka* trees and lose themselves in the blue skies above; and this spot I have, by some unaccountable carelessness, failed to explore. What if the lady Janaki kept in durance in these lovely glades? I will not allow a single moment to cross into the realms of the dark past. I call upon in deep humility and steadfast devotion upon the hosts of Vasus, Rudras, Adityas, Asvins, Maruts and their kin to aid me in my quest and strengthen my arms to lay low this wretched brood of the *rakshasas*.

Even as a god who confers success on him that had prayed at his feet for countless years, I will not fail in taking Queen Sita to the side of my lord Rama, whose glory illuminates the royal race of Raghu."

Thus Anjaneya of matchless splendour cogitate within himself; but care and doubt darkened the horizon of his heart and turned his senses adrift. But he flung it away from him as an old garment and girded his loins for a fresh attempt. "I lay my head at the feet of Rama, Lakshmana, Janaki, Rudra, Indra, Yama, Vayu, Chandra, Surya, the Maruts and one and all of the lords of the Shining Ones."

He again sought with his heart and soul, the Lord of the day and his king Sugriva : and gazed intently with a piercing eye at the quarters above and below. He assured himself that there was none to watch his movements. He cast his looks upon the lofty grove of *asokas,* and decided to leave no spot in it unexplored. And accordingly he formed his plans therefor.

"This pleasure grove may contain within itself many a glade, many a retreat; and countless *rakshasas,* may roam in its dark depths. I have no doubt that the trees and the plants will have expert gardeners to look after them, their manure and their irrigation. Yet I note that the lord Vayu, from whose loins I was born and in whom are centred the life-breaths of this universe, moves soft and pleasantly. I have most carefully reduced my shape to the required limit to escape the piercing eye of the guardians of this wood and the soldiers of Ravana : and ensure success and glory to the arms of my lord Rama. May the holy saints and the Gods on high bless with success bright, my search for the lady Sita. May my attempts prove fruitful through the blessings of the self-born Brahma, Surya, Chandra, Asvins, Maruts, Rudra and others of their kind. May my plans carry success and fulfilment in themselves through the good wishes of all created beings : their lord Vishnu and every one that meets my eye on my way and even those that I do not see.

Or shall I ever behold through the blessings of these gods, the noble features of lady Sita that bring joy and delight to all beings, even like the orbed moon and graced with a perfect chiselled nose, shining teeth, a smile that irradiates the space around like soft moonlight and eyes that put to shame, the lovely petals of the blown red lotus. The meanest and the most despicable of objects upto any crime or sin, this lord of *rakshasas* strikes terror into the hearts of all creations through his terrible deeds. But most wonderfully he manages to disguise his dreadful features and takes the shape and form that would seduce the hearts of all. And mighty and boundless must be his strength and assurance in that he has laid violent hands upon Janaki and brought her over here, that paragon of wifely devotion, leading a life of voluntary exile far far away from those near and dear to her. And how shall I come upon her?"

CHAPTER 14

THE ASOKA GROVE

HAVING taken counsel with himself for a brief space he prepared to enter the grove. And Maruti of bright effulgence, lightly leapt over his lofty walls. And as he gazed beyond from his lofty perch, his whole body was filled with inexplicable thrills of joy. He beheld the mango, the *champaka,* the *asoka,* the *sala* and many other tall lords of the forest in the first bloom of spring.

Next, like a sharp arrow shot from a mighty bow, he dived into the depths of the woods of mango and the numerous creepers that hid them from view. The sweet sounds of cuckoos, peacocks, bees and many other birds fell soft and pleasant upon his ears.

Herds of deer and other beasts roamed fearlessly through it. Many a rare tree in flower and fruit shone like the morning sun, as if they were fashioned of gold and silver. In its wonderful and strange glades, there sported many a creature in utter fearlessness and delight.

As Maruti passed on intent upon his quest for Janaki of matchless beauty and excellence of heart, he rudely awoke the birds sleeping peacefully. They rose in affright all around and flapping their wings against the trees, dropped showers of many coloured flowers. And Hanuman covered as it were with them, looked like a mountain of leaves, buds and flowers. It was no wonder that the denizens of wood took him for the god of spring as Anjaneya darted here and there through the thick groves.

The ground adorned with the clouds of flowers from the trees appeared like a lovely maiden in the pride of her dress and ornaments. The trees themselves rained strange flowers all around as they were lost to and fro by the speed.of Maruti's rapid flight through them. They stood there bare of leaf, flower and fruit and unpleasant to the eye, even like ill-shared gamblers who have struck upon a streak of ill-luck and were made to divest themselves of their garments and jewels, by their successful partners. They looked as if they were caught in the centre of a fierce storm and afforded but scant refuge, deprived of fruits, flowers, leaves and birds. In short, that grove of *asokas* presented a sorry appearance, trampled by arms, feet and the tail of Hanuman out of all recognition. It looked like a proud lady in flush of her youth and beauty, who came out of a long daliance with her lover, her hair all dishevelled, her charming and intricate decorations of sandal and other perfumes on her forehead, arms and bodies all blotted out of shape, her ruby lips now on a level with her teeth of ivory whiteness through the burning kisses of her beloved and with the marks of nails and teeth scattered over her body. That mighty monkey tore to pieces the thick huge creepers around the trees, even like his father the lord Vayu scatters before him the thick cloud-banks of winter.

Maruti in his search through the ground came upon many a floor inlaid with gold, silver and gems. Many a tank was to be found there, fashioned in strange shapes. The steps thereof shone with precious stones; the floor was crystal; the sand on the bed thereof was powdered pearl, coral, and many a priceless material; sweet water, lympid and cool like the *amrita* lapped its brim; the lotus, lily and many a flower hid the water from view in their bloom; and upon these many a water-fowl cooed pleasantly; streams, streamlets, rivers, rivulets emptied themselves into it from all sides. The banks were covered with thickets and fangled underwood and rare specimens of *santana, kalpaka, harichandana* and other heavenly trees.

A little beyond he saw an artificial hill of earth very pleasantly laid out. Black like a rain-cloud, with lofty heights and strange peaks, with rocky chambers, it was hid beneath trees of wonderful variety. A torrent rushed down its slopes, even like unto a girl suddenly offended with her lover and springing away from his knees. And as if to continue the fancy, trees of fertile luxuriance lived on its banks, with their leafy heads merged in its waters, even like the same wilful maiden restrained in her angry course by her kin and mates.

And as if to complete the comparison, they made the current flow back barred by a thick barricade of trees, even like the selfsame lady returning to her lover after a short-lived spell of anger. Within a stone's throw of it, there were pools of lotus, haunted by birds of rare and varied plumage. And they were interspersed with long sheets of water, cool, clear and clement, pleasantly lapping its banks, with steps leading down into it of rare mosaics of gems, and the bed of powdered pearl. And on either side thereof were curiously fashioned pavilions from which there met the eye, groves, woods and glades of wonderful variety heaving with birds and beasts all from the hand of Visvakarma, the architect of the heaven world.

All round some large monarchs of the forest bending low under the graceful burden of fruits and flowers, were laid out broad platforms. And upon them were built smaller platforms of gold and canopied with lofty roofings to ward off sun and rain. And there Maruti beheld a towering *simsupa* tree entirely hid from view by leaf and creeper; it dazzled the eye from afar by its golden brilliance and platforms of beaten gold that shone with the fiery radiance. "Verily" exclaimed Maruti, "the blinding light from these trees has turned my body into rare gold, even as if the sun takes on the columns of the golden mountain Meru." And on that lofty *simsupa* tree towering over other grand specimens, there were hung myriads of small bells most sweetly chiming in the gentle breeze, now and then.

Hanuman got up that tree and seated in the depths of leaf, flower, shoot and bud, said to himself, "I might from here behold, if it is given to me, the lady Janaki ever yearning in her heart for a sight of her beloved.

Might not my good star direct her feet there, had she roamed here and there, a stranger to sleep, through the heavy grief that weighs her down. Her soul must delight in ranging through this *asoka* grove, rich with *champaka, chandana* and other rare trees. Now the birds make pleasant music over this lotus pool. And the lady Sita never has enough of spending her time in joy among these woods. It is not unlikely that she may come over here, wan and dispirited from her overlong separation from Raghava, to seek respite from her trouble. Further, her heart goes out with tenderness towards the creatures that roamed through these woods. Years has she been a ranger of forests. In the prime of youth and beauty she would, of a truth, bend her steps here to escape the unsympathetic and irritating crowd of her jailors and dream her hours away in sweet meditation on Raghava; or to silently recall the old happy days, when she dwelt in the dark depths of Dandaka, in the company of Rama and Lakshmana; or to offer her prayers to the Deity of morning twilight in this rivulet of clear cool waters. Verily, this wood is such a one as she would like to wander through; and she is most fitting ornament to this rich scenery. If she is anywhere among the living, she would not fail to come down to this water-course."

And Maruti of matchless intellect hid himself yet more deeply in the *simsupa* tree and expectant of the appearance of the lady Sita from any quarter, he gazed intently all round.

CHAPTER 15

MARUTI AND SITA

FROM his lofty perch upon that tree, Hanuman sought for Sita all round; and the earth and the groves that covered it, did not escape his piercing eye. The effulgence from the *kalpaka* and other trees from the heaven of Indra, made broad daylight far and wide; cuckoos sang sweet and pleasant. The *asoka* burnt with fierce light like unto fire and the morning sun, with their fruits and flowers of gold. In short, every kind and variety of flower of all seasons found a place therein. Some trees were gaily decked with jewelled patterns of flowers. Maruti beheld many an *asoka* tree covered from head to foot with fruit, leaf and flower and seeking the welcome repose of Mother Earth under the weight that was too much for it. Myriads of birds, of wonderful variety flew down upon them and seemed to give them the appearance of a tree entirely denuded of leaf. Water-courses were gay with golden lotuses in bloom. The grove charmed away the hearts of the beholders with its sweet perfumes and charming scenery. Why, there was found in it every type of bird and beast that could delight the eye and the heart.

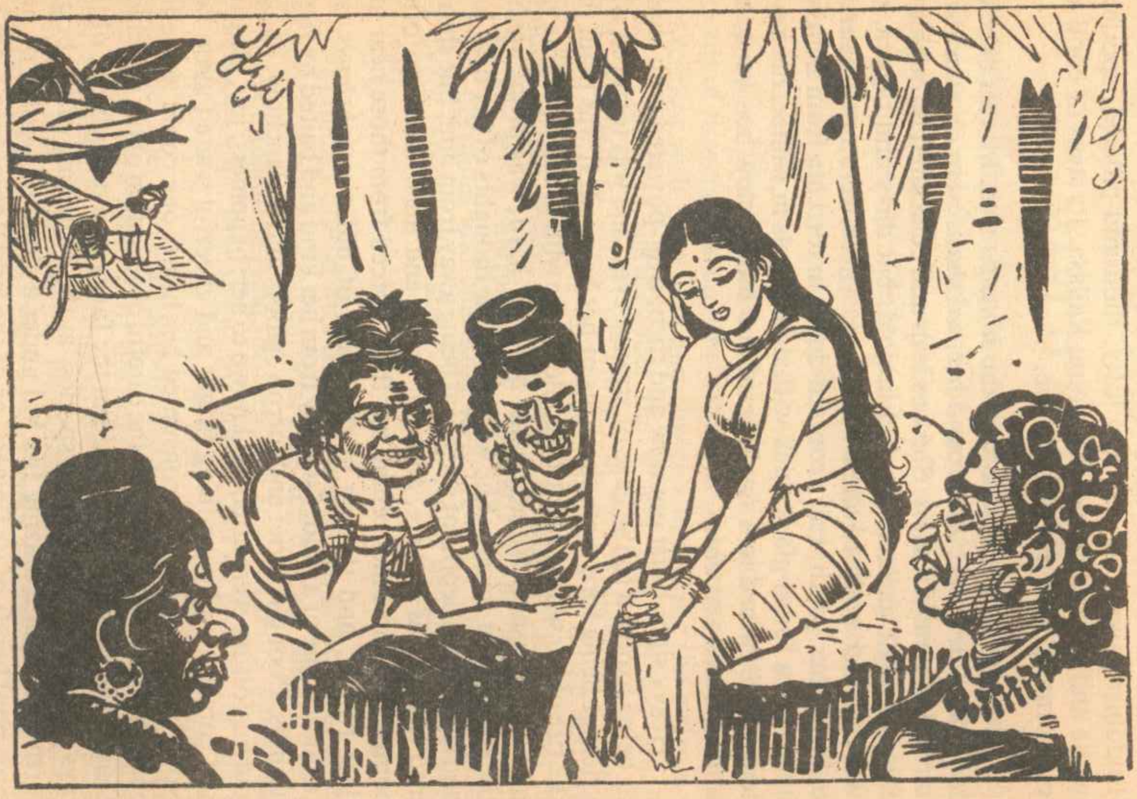
It was thickly dotted with terraces, mansions, palaces of noblemen, seats, sofas, couches carpets, rugs and lounges within. There was no spot unadorned and the Nandana grove of Indra was a pale object by its side. It gave one the notion that all around the space was on fire; such was the sheen of trees. *Champaka, saptaparna, indugi* and other rare trees deep-rooted and stately were to be found there along with *asokas,* of the colour of gold, fire or jet. Most heart entrancing, almost impossible to describe, of wonderful splendour and glory, like the Nandana of Indra, it dispensed the Chaitraratha of Kubera. The thick clusters of flowers gave it the appearance of a star-lit sky, or the ocean-beds paved with gems, or the holy mountain Gandhamadana, by its leaf, flower and fruit of all seasons, fragrant trees, honey-laden beasts and birds of rich variety and the sweet blend of their joyful praise.

And in the midst of that grove, not far from the place of his concealment, Maruti discovered a mansion built on the lines of the Buddhist pagoda. It was very lofty, thousand-pillared, spotlessly white and very much like the mount Kailasa. Its steps of coral and platform of gold dazzled the eye.

Then, in a mansion hardby the *simsupa* tree, Maruti beheld a lady, a noble dame. All around her, *rakshasis* were on guard with unwinking watchfulness. She was lean and emaciated through long fast. A single garment worked in gold, but dirty and ragged, she wore on her body covered with dust. There were no ornaments befitting her youth; tears coursed down in torrents from her dark eyes; like a forest glade thick with dun woods in winter, her raven locks were twined in a single braid and hung below her waist, like unto a black serpent.

Heavy sighs burst out now and then; over-powered with shame at being exposed to the gaze of strange eyes, she was tortured with grief, at being torn from the arms of her beloved. It was plain that the fire of her wifely devotion could, if she willed, consume this vast universe to ashes. No adamant, however hard, was proof against the sight of her misery. She was lost in the thoughts of her dear lord and sunk in the depths of sorrow at being away from him. She shrank into herself, as it were, through grief; and alas! knew no other companion, no other refuge but that. Forced from those near and dear to her, and thrown in the midst of hideous *rakshasis,* she reminded one of a hind, far away from her kind and baited by fierce hounds. Poor girl! grief and sorrow, gloom and melancholy, danger and misfortune were utterly unknown to her; happiness, joy, pleasure and comfort and everything bright and cheerful waited upon her. Now, grief unspeakable consumed her heart; one could make her out as the lady Janaki only by the careful observation of her matchless beauty and perfect shape. She put the fancy into one's head, of the rays of the moon, pure and spotless at the beginning of the bright fortnight, or of a blazing fire hid under a cloud of smoke, or of a lotus pool bereft of its flowers, or of the lady Rohini torn from her dear lord, the Moon and in the cruel clutches of Mars.

Maruti gazed intently upon that lady, dark with dust and dirt, lank and lean and broad-eyed; and decided unto himself by sound



reasons, that she was no other than the lady Sita. "I see not the slightest difference between this noble dame and her whom I beheld when she was carried away by Ravana who could command any shape he willed. A face like unto the moon in her orb, eye-brows like the delicate bow in the hands of Cupid, eyes broad and full like the petals of lotus, tinged with slight red and trembling in affright like a haunted fawn, dark raven hair, eye lashes black as jet and delicately curved, coral lips, breasts, full and gloriously fashioned like globes of gold, slim waist, — all these, on a closer view, confirming in my conclusion that this is the lady Sita and no other.

The space around, far and near, is lighted by the splendour of her body. Her limbs are well-shaped and perfectly knit. She might be most easily mistaken for the lady Rati, the wife of the God of love. Like the Lady of the night in her full, she is an object that the entire creation would yearn to look at. I see the marks of perfect womanhood on her body and limbs. She looks as if in deep meditation like a hermit, as she sits on the ground and heaves deep sighs. But, it would be death to approach her, even like the dear queen of the Lord of the *nagas*. Her glory and splendour is lost behind the thick dark veil of grief unutterable, even like a blazing fire hid under clouds of smoke.

The holy texts of Manu and the other sages that are of doubtful import, a fortune on the wane, earnestness without confidence, hopes unfulfilled, success barred by obstacles, a noble intellect bewildered, fair fame blasted with foul calumny, the glory of the moon in the dark jaws of surcharged rain-clouds, heterodox knowledge unknown to fame and reverence through being deprived of the basic foundation of the scriptures, the vedic chants dim and hazy, through irregular and spasmodic recitation, all these fancies flit across one's brain at the sight of this lady Sita. She lets cruel grief

> "Like the worm in the bud,
> Feed on her damask cheek; she pines in thought,
> And, with a green and yellow melancholy,
> She sits like Patience on a monument, smiling at grief."

She is at the end of her hopes that her dear lord Rama would come again to rescue her. She is but a shadow of her former self, from the cankering shame at being polluted by the touch of Ravana. Friendless, helpless in the midst of her enemies, her frightened look, falls all around; for, she knows not what further evil may befall her at any moment.

The heavy tears have dimmed her face. The best and brightest ornament do but derive a lustre and glory from being worn by her; but now, she has cast them away from her." Thus and many a wise did Hanuman reason within himself. Gaze at her, as he may ever so often, he could not clear his mind of haunting doubts. A novice at his studies in the stage of his ignorance of the language and the science of it, interprets a pregnant text wrongly; but, when his novitiate has gone by, he labours hard and is awarded by the correct rendering of the very same passage. Even so, the lady Janaki, bereft of ornament of every kind, was extremely difficult to identify from the description that Rama gave and his own momentary observation.

But Maruti did not despair. He assured himself through some other reasons that she was the lady Sita, of broad and lovely eyes and fair-famed. He cast his piercing looks all around her and slowly made out that all the ornaments that Rama had described to him as being worn by her, were hung from the overhanging trees about. Curiously fashioned ear-rings, bracelets of coral and gems, chains, rings and such like jewels were blackened with the consuming fire that raged in her heart at being away from her beloved.But through long wear, they left marks upon her body, even in their absence. "These verily are the ornaments that Rama described to me. Such as were dropped by her in our midst as we sat on the mountain, are not here. The rest I see before me. It is this lady and no other that threw down to us, as she was spirited away through the skies, her upper garment of green and gold and her sweet sounding ornaments. The robe that she now wears is dark from long use and ragged. But I see not the slightest difference in the matter of her dress or complexion or splendour, as I beheld her from mount Risyamuka. Even though it should come about from this favourite queen of Raghava, this paragon of wifely devotion, this golden vision should become naught. Yet she is always present in the heart of Rama. There is not the slightest doubt in my mind that this is the very same lady. Verily this is the self same lady Sita about whom Rama grieves ever so sore for reasons untold."

"The meanest object in creation counts it as a duty and quite naturally, that it should ward off danger and sorrow from her who has sought the shelter of its love; but alas! I have lowered myself even far beyond it." Thus utter compassion melts his heart. "Have I not laid it down as a law unto myself that I will not fail to cast my shield over him that seeks refuge in me? Now this my wife, the beloved, has fought for the privilege of coming with me to the forest and sharing my dangers and difficulties. And she does it nobly, cheerfully and incites me by her example. And such a one has been easily abandoned by me to the tender mercy of the blood-thirsty *rakshasas.*"

Thus tenderness and compassion gnaws at his heart. "The holy texts tell us that the wife is the better half of man. I called upon the Lord of fire to witness the holy sacraments of our wedlock. And her, have I lost beyond hope." Thus remorse and grief assail him with overwhelming force. "Torn from the arms of the life of my life, the light of my eyes, my twin soul, yet, this wretched frame of mine crumbles not." Thus he is consumed with the slow, but intense flames of separation from his love. A closer view confirms me the belief that these two evince no difference in appearance from shape, build and constitution.

So I decide that this gem of womanhood is in every way a fit mate for my lord. Her heart is ever twined round him; and his heart centres in her. Else, is it in any way possible that these two could keep their hold upon life even for a second?

When the lord Raghava was grieving sore, for the lady Sita and raving like a mad man, I almost laughed at him and mocked his grief. "What a curious inconsistency! This Raghuvira claims to be the disciple of the thrice holy saint Vasishta. He allows himself to be considered as one for whom knowledge and wisdom, lay and occult, have no secrets. He is ranked among the foremost of warriors with frame of iron, nerves of steel and whom dangers and difficulties, hardships and privations, grief and sorrow, assail not. An ideal grieves and raves over the loss of an ordinary woman". But

I spoke from the view point, most stupid of a celibate and of an utter stranger to woman and everything connected with her. But, now that I have with these eyes beheld her marvellous beauty and utter abasement, I have not the shadow of a doubt that I am the prince of fools.

Well well, live and learn. And I have been taught the lesson of my life. I was suffering from a swollen head at the thought of my most wonderful achievement of crossing the expanse of waters. But the lord Rama, has lost this peerless lady of his and yet clings to life. The most wonderful feat that breaks all previous records and beats them hollow. Most strange that the raging fire of his grief consumes him not. It is almost impossible for me to conceive how he could be away from the side of this most noble lady even for a second and yet count himself among the living.

Well, what is it to him. He is a prince, the heir-apparent to the throne of the Ikshvakus. Government, war, chase, elephant, horses, chariot and weapons are more in his line than the signs of winning the heart of a noble lady. And yet what a prince! The shadow of one, the mockery as it were. A most worthy prince he is, doubtless who has allowed himself to be robbed of the sense of his power, might and fame. A most exemplary prince and lord he is, who casts to his enemies, him who seeks refuge from them.

But the same cannot be said of the lady Sita. She is not free to act as she wills; she is the wife of another and his word is a law unto her; she cannot, in duty bound, cast away her tortured frame, unless he bids her do so. Now Rama is his own master, independent, absolutely free to think and act. And then, that body of his is not himself. It was but taken for a purpose; one keeps it on, naturally to enjoy the pleasures of life and not to be racked and tortured with pain and grief. A violent death and suicide is most heinous, most reprehensible. But Rama has in himself the remedy. The raging fires of grief are quite enough for the work."

Maruti again cast his eyes on the lady Sita who sat there absorbed in her thoughts of Rama, wan, pale, clad in a single garment soiled with dust and dirt; and his heart rejoiced thereat. He laid himself at the feet of Sri Rama whose image was enthroned in his heart and lauded him saying "Thrice fortunate are you, and no doubt of it, who claims as his wife the noble lady who reserves from stain, her wifely purity in the strong hope of being united to you some day."

CHAPTER 16

MARUTI'S GRIEF

THUS did Anjaneya laud Sri Rama, crowned with infinite rare excellences and the lady Janaki, the worthy object of reverence and praise of the entire creation; and yet, his heart was again weighed with doubt and grief. Tears coursed down his cheeks as he revolved within himself the misery and wretchedness of the noble queen and he burst out into lamentations. "Lakshmana deems it an honour to pay humble reverence and worship to her; and he has sat at the feet of such holy sages as Vasishtha. This is the beloved wife of Raghunatha to whom the world looks for light and wisdom. Mighty, most mighty is Destiny, that it has dared to lay its icy hands on such a one as this daughter of Janaka. Verily I am driven to conclude that there is no armour against Fate. She knows right well the innermost heart of Rama and Lakshmana; and is not the least affected by the unspeakable danger and grief that assail her, even like the mother Ganga whom the winter twines cannot deluge to overflow. An ideal pair these, in age, beauty, excellence, character, conduct and ancestry. (Sita measures to defend herself; she thought it most unnatural, for, a wife is ever under the protection of her husband and has no call to doubt and act for herself. There was Raghava who proclaimed unto the world, "He who seeks refuge in me, is free from the slightest fear or apprehension from every object in creation; this is the motto of our royal race; this is the law I have laid unto myself; I hold my life cheap if I could ward off danger and grief from him who seeks me." And Lakshmana is ever at his side as his right arm; even he of unerring eye, who pierced into the skilful disguise of the golden deer Maricha.

(Similarity of age, between Rama and Sita follows from a text of *Vishnusmriti* which says, "The wife should be one third of the age of the husband or the husband may be eleven years old and his wife eight).

Maruti again cast his eyes upon the lady Maithili of the hue of mountain gold and resplendent even as Mahalakshmi bringing joy and delight to the hearts of all beings. He could not but think of Rama and exclaimed, "Lord Raghava! Was it not for this noble lady that you laid low with a shaft the most mighty Vali and Kabandha the equal of Ravana in valour and prowess? Was it not for this lady that you despatched to the mansions of death, the terrible Viradha, even as Indra slew of yore, the *asura* Sambara? Was it not for this noble lady that the fourteen thousand fierce *rakshasas* fell a prey to your fiery shafts at Janasthana, in sport as it were? Was it not for this lady that Khara, Dushana and Trisiras, all redoubtable warriors and generals, gave up their lives on the field of battle, consumed by your valour? Why! The broad realms of Vali, his power, and his wealth were matchless upon earth, and far beyond the utmost dreams of others and rightly extolled by the world. And was it nor for this lady that it all fell to the lot of Sugriva to enjoy? And was it not for this noble lady of broad and lovely eyes that I too crossed the dark waters and came over here? I would count it most just and most natural if Rama made sad havoc of this sea-girt earth and its sister worlds. Now which is most desirable, the absolute lordship over the earth, the middle world and the heavens, the *triloka* as it were; or, the privilege and honour of calling the lady Janaki as one's wife and the queen? Why what a fool I am, even to allow the question in my heart! For, the three worlds and all they hold are not worth the grain of dust on the feet of my lady Sita. The royal saint Janaka was ploughing the sacrificial field. *Dharma* had no secrets for him; for, he was its mightiest exponent down on earth. When lo! this most holy, and auspicious lady came out from the depths of Mother earth, right at the end of the plough, with her lovely body covered by the sacred dust of the sacrificial ground, even like the pollen of the red lotus. She is verily wifely perfection incarnate. Besides, she is the first bride in the house of king Dasaratha of high ideals, bright fame and undaunted courage in battle. And she is the darling wife of Sri Rama to whom duty of every kind is an open book, as also the practice thereof, the mystery of things. And now, behold her in the cruel grip of these frightful *rakshasis*. Oh, what a horror! she placed before everything, her love to her husband; and left behind her, the pomp and power and the luxury of royalty and came out with him into the pathless woods that knew no human presence without the slightest regard for the miseries of a forest life. Roots, fruits and such like produce of the woods is the sweetest fare unto her. To serve her lord, at all times, in all places and in every way, he is her soul's delight, intensified a thousand fold and not to be compared for a moment with the pleasures of her royal palace in Ayodhya. Most unmeet, to face even the slightest worry, anxiety or sorrow, of the hue of the purest gold, with a radiant smile and a sweet word ever on her lips, yet, she bears all patiently like her Mother Earth, these horrors and cruelties. In the merciless grasp of this lord of the demons, yet she swerves not a hair's breadth from the noble path of right; and it is most just, that Sri Rama should be united to her again and glad at his heart, even as a traveller in a desert with cracked lips and blackened tongue, turns his delirious eyes upon an oasis, bright with emerald grass and shady trees, through which sparkles the fiery waters of babbling fountains. Sri Rama will be beside himself with joy at meeting her again, even as a royal exile in adversity and despair suddenly raised to the lordship of this broad earth. Deprived of the comforts and luxuries that is hers by right, torn with a brutal hand from those near and dear to her, she yet keeps a tenacious hold upon life in the hope that her lord will not fail to find her out here and she will some day be clasped in his arms. Her heart, her soul, her very existence is centred in Raghava; his image fills her heart and leaves no room for any other thought; hence she is cleanly oblivious of her tormentors and of these woods and trees around her. To a loyal wife, the brightest and the noblest ornament, is her lord and love. And separated from this noble dame is dimmed of lustre, though she deserves that ornament most.

What a wonder that Rama, the lord of the world finds his side empty of his beloved and yet keeps his hold on life! Grief and sorrow have yet spared him. Verily this is an impossible feat.

I have heard it said that it is most rare to find a woman with the ends of her hair black; and this lady endowed with her rare excellences fascinates even Sri Rama with her raven locks. The red lotus in its bloom hides its diminished head before her eyes. Her fittest place is on the lap of Rama; and now she is in the cruel grasp of these horrible *rakshasis*. I, a mere ranger of the wood, am filled with unspeakable grief at beholding her; then imagine what it would be to Sri Rama, the soul of compassion. If it is so to me who have put behind myself the joys and pleasures of life, how would it be to Rama who is fashioned in every way to enjoy all that life could give? This noble lady has it in her hand to consume to ashes by the might of her wifely devotion and chastity, this Ravana who wrought her grievous wrong. Yet she holds back her anger; and her patience and serenity is beyond the dreams of even Mother Earth.

I would give anything to know how beautiful and lovely her eyes would have been when she lived free and unknown to care and grief under the mighty protection of Rama and Lakshmana? And that self-same fortunate lady is now in the midst of fierce-eyed *rakshasis*.

Cruel indeed is the heart of Destiny, cruel beyond comparison that has made her seek for a shelter, this lofty tree. Even as a lotus pool that has long delighted all creatures with its incomparable beauty, but has turned black and unpleasant to look at through deadly touch of frost, this lady Sita passed twelve long years in a dream of bliss in the company of Rama, through the delightful hills and vales, glades and forests, and lo! grief and misery laid their hands upon her and has bereft her of joy and glory. Yet it is possible to adjust oneself to life, if joy and sorrow come in turns; but this daughter of Janaka is engulfed in a long endless night of misery, unrelieved by the slightest gleam of hope. The *chakravakas* cannot meet during the day; such is their lot; and yet they bear up looking forward to the gentle and merciful night to bring them together. Now Janaki would in a way, steal her heart against the shafts of adversity if she but knew when she might be clasped in the arms of her beloved; but that is all dark and gloomy, the barren future. Poor girl! She sees before her a dead blank wall of utter darkness.

And misfortunes never come singly. She was never brought up to pass through such hardship; for, Janaka her father lavished every care and attention upon her as the child brought to him marvellously by the Mother Earth to cheer his barren heart. And now this charming grove in the bloom of spring is verily misnamed *Asoka* (griefless), while her *soka* (grief) is intensified a thousand-fold by it. And a meet companion has it found in the Queen of night who brings joy and delight to the hearts of all beings but blasts her to nothing with her thousand fierce rays all ablaze."

Thus did Maruti conclude within himself by many an inference, many a process of hard reasoning, that the lady he saw was Sita and none other. And yet matchless though he was in strength and speed, he remained hid amidst the leafy shelter of the lofty *simsupa*.

(Here Tilaka the commentator takes it that Maruti spent three quarters of the night in his search through Lanka and the palace of Ravana and the fourth quarter in the *Asoka* grove; he remained there during the next day and spoke to Sita during the night that followed. But other commentators crowd into that one night, the above incidents and what followed until Ravana sent his troups against Hanuman).

CHAPTER 17

THE RAKSHASIS

LIKE unto the lordly swan sailing through the dark waters, like unto a cluster of lilies in a crystal pool, the Queen of night sailed through the blue empyrean pure and spotless, in all her glory. As if she would contribute her mite, to forward the interests of Rama, she threw her clear light on everything that Maruti desired to see and charmed away his weariness and fatigue by her cool and brilliant rays.

Then Hanuman cast his eyes again on the lady Sita the moon-faced queen of Rama, who staggered under the strokes of misery. Like a lordly steamer battered by the mountainous billows and slowly sinking down helpless, a closer look brought within his range, the *rakshasis* around her.

There was variety enough to choose among them. There were one-eyed beauties in the group; one-eared specimens were conspicuous too by their presence. Some covered their heads with their ears, while others disdained the item at all. Yet others made up for it by their fan-like ears. Some had their noses tilted up in full like the chimneys in a factory. Some had their necks fashioned after the style of giraffes, while others were short-necked like bulls. Some had a sprinkling of hair over their heads, just an apology for it; and others were entirely innocent of the article.

Some had matted hair like a carpet, while others covered themselves from head to foot with that shaggy appendage. Some had hanging ears, hanging noses, hanging lips, hanging breasts and stomachs that covered their thighs. Some charming ladies had their lips transplanted on their chins, while others had their knees beautifully crooked and bent. Some gloved in the utter disproportion of their limbs. Some were hunch-backs. Some were dwarfs. Some had their lips of men's proportions. Some disported their long curved tusks. Some displayed their eyes of tawny hue. Some had their faces strikingly wry. There were others who gloried in the absence of nose or lips. Frightful shapes, various styles of deformity, specimen of stunning yellow and black hue, incarnations of increasing wrath, mischief-makers, amazons trying with tridents, crowbars, iron clubs and such like gentle weapons; ladies who affected the faces and features of boars, hogs, pigs, deer, bulls, tigers, sheep, jackals, elephants, cows, horses, asses and such like; others who delighted in their delicately fashioned feet after the model of camels, horses and elephants; some there were, who sported their heads sunk low between their shoulders. Some found a single hand and foot quite enough for all purposes. Some were akin to the ass, the horse, the cow, the elephant and monkey, in the matter of their ears. When it came to the noses, some were absolutely strangers to it; some had it on a very large scale; some had it across their faces. Some had it at the top of their heads. Speaking of feet, some were blessed with huge proportions of it. Some had a luxurious growth of hair upon them; some took after the elephant, the cow and such like in that appendage. Others had their necks, breasts, head, stomach and face ridiculously disproportionate and huge. Yet others were blessed with lolling tongues and curved talons. And there were also ladies whose hair impressed the beholders with the idea of wreaths of smoke.

These, every one of them, were ever intent upon finding a way to satisfy their insatiable appetite and had never enough of meat and drink, at times varied with liberal draughts of blood when they could get it.

Their body was encrusted with layers of flesh, marrow and blood so that the hearts of the beholders turned into water and their hair stood on end. These were comfortably arranged around the tree.

And Sita lay in their midst like unto the full-moon playing hide and seek through the dun clouds. Born in the royal house of the Videhas, at whose feet lay everything that the world could offer, endowed with every excellence and virtue that people hold in reverence, the life and soul of the king initiate Janaka, to whose open eye lay clear the scroll of wisdom, yet she was in the relentless clutches of adversity and sorrow. Like the orbed moon fast disappearing into the dark jaws of the eclipse, she had parted with her splendour and radiance. Her braids matted and caked with dust and dirt, she looked like a bright star, falling from its high state at the expiry of its merit. The first and foremost exponent of wifely devotion, yet she was not blessed with a sight of her beloved. Bereft of ornaments and jewels, yet she shone supreme in the glory that radiated from the crest-jewel upon her, the illimitable love of Sri Rama. She was torn from the arms of those near and dear to her by the fierce *rakshasis* and placed here in durance vile, even as a lordly she-elephant driven from its herd by the fierce king of the woods and in dread expectation of his fatal stroke. She reminded one of a ray of the moon, dull and dim, behind the thick cloud at the fag end of the rains. Her beauty was shadowed and her limbs heavy with dust, in that they were a stranger for months to a luxurious bath. A *Vina* without the strings, fit to adorn the side of Sri Rama all unmeet to be seen even in the wildest dreams in the midst of the *asoka* (griefless) grove, like unto the constellation Rohini in the grip of the cruel planets, or the lovely creeper from which the flowers had fallen away, her limbs are dark with dirt; yet her natural loveliness shines through it all. Like unto a lotus stalk caked with mud, she was clad in ragged finery; yet her splendour cannot be hidden beneath the disguise. Her face is wan and dull and shows no hope of relief; but she plucks up courage and hope from the constant contemplation of the glory and prowess of her husband. Her eyes are dark and troubled with fast-falling tears. These *rakshasis* are set here by Ravana to guard her, but she is best armed and protected in her immaculate chastity. She darts her looks all round like a frightened fawn. Her hot sighs seem to reduce to black cinders, the young shoots on the trees around. She is an incarnation as it were, of all kinds of grief rolled into one. She resembles a storm-tossed ocean of sorrow. The soul of patience, her perfect limbs shine in their natural beauty without the aid or help of ornaments. In the darkest and lowest depths of adversity and misfortune, she keeps a steady hold over security and peace.

Hanuman beheld the lady Maithili in her captivity and shed tears not of sorrow but joy. He betook himself in thought to the presence of Rama and Lakshmana and laid his head at their feet again and again and said it is verily by your supreme grace that it is given to me to bless my eyes with a sight of this most virtuous lady. He could never have enough of gazing at her. His heart overflowed with joy and he bided his time in the hospitable shelter of the lofty *simsupa*.

CHAPTER 18

RAVANA IN THE ASOKA GROVE

THERE yet was left to Maruti only a small part of the night after his wide search for Sita through Lanka, after his entry into the *asoka* grove and after his careful observation of the lady to satisfy himself that she was Sita and none else. The mighty lord of the isle was called back to the world of mortals by the sweet sounds of auspicious music, vocal and instrumental that ushered in a new day. His first thoughts on waking were of Sita to whom he had lost his heart and whose lovely image filled it ever. His dress and decorations all loose and disordered, endowed with strength and pride beyond the widest reach of imagination, yet he was a slave to his unholy lust after Sita. So, he rose from his bed and in his royal disorder he took his way to the *asoka* grove through the roads that threaded the gardens rich and brilliant with gold and gems. It was the home of trees ever bright with fruits and flowers. Long sheets of water covered with flowers of diverse hue charmed the eye. Birds of strange colour and plumage and beasts of every kind made it their home.

And as Ravana passed through it with a careless eye upon its wonders, many of his wives followed him even as nymphs of heaven attend upon their lord Indra. Some went before him with golden lights; some waved soft chowries by his side; some fanned him gently; some bore goblets and flagons of gold; some bore swords and other weapons; some carried stools, seats and settees. There was a lady among them who bore in a gem-encrusted jar of gold, sweet flavoured wine; and there walked behind him another noble lady with the royal umbrella set in a rod of gold and casting a bright sheen all round like a lordly swan or the moon in its full. Like streaks of lightning in a cloud, the ladies of Ravana went with him, their eyes heavy with sleep. Their limbs adorned with curious patterns in sandal, aloes and other perfumes, their ornaments in wild disorder, their hair flowing loose about them and tiny beads of perspiration on the brows like delicate dew drops on the blown petals of flowers, they walked with unsteady gait under the influence of wine and sleep.

Their eyes red with too frequent potations; their lovely hair adorned with exquisite chaplets; their garlands about their shoulders faded with hot sweat, they followed their lord through love and respect, even to the presence of their rival. And he, their dread lord and mighty, was hastening with proud and lordly steps to meet the lady Sita, burning with unholy and unbridled lust and entirely oblivious of everything except his one overpowering passion. And there fell upon the ears of Hanuman the sweet tinkle of anklets and waist bonds.

Some ladies went before Dasagriva with lamps of gold in their hands filled with sweet perfumed oils. Ravana shone in their midst like the God of Love armed with his bow of sugarcane as he walked along with slanting eyes of coppery red and his heart a prey to pride, haughtiness and lust. His upper garment, white and spotless as the foam on the milk newly churned, caught in his armlets; and all oblivious of it he took his way dragging it after him. And Anjaneya from his leafy retreat cast his eyes intently upon the lord of Lanka, of matchless strength, valour and other rare excellent things impossible to others that were of no account to him; though far away, yet his exceeding splendour deceived one into the belief that he was very near; and in his wake there came with a charming grace, his wives peerless in their duty and loveliness. And thus did the famed lord of Lanka enter the *asoka* grove at their head.

The first born of the holy saint Visravas, the ruler of the destinies of the *rakshasa*-world, endowed with illimitable strength, his eyes erect and aggressive with the pride that filled his heart, he advanced towards Maruti with his strangely fashioned ornaments and decorations with his queens around him like the lord of night in the midst of the starry court.

The son of Vayu said to himself, "Verily this is the mighty warrior Ravana and none else"; and to follow more closely the movements of Ravana, he lowered himself to another perch. In fact, Hanuman born of the loins of the puissant Lord of air, endowed with the might, the strength, the speed and splendour of the Lord Garuda himself, could not face him, the *rakshasa* king; such was the blinding lustre that shone around him. So, he said to himself "I cannot conceal from myself the fact that my clever disguise and tiny shape are of no avail before this master of illusions"; and hid himself more closely behind the flowers and leaves. And Ravana drew near meanwhile all athirst to behold Sita the black-eyed and hair dark at the ends.

CHAPTER 19

SITA

THE royal Janaki caught sight of her captor Ravana, who came to pay her a visit under the irresistible impulse of his unholy love for her, dressed in all the pomp and paraphernalia of royalty and in the glorious bloom of eternal youth and beauty; a paragon of wifely virtue trembled in all her limbs as a tender plantain in the mighty grasps of the gale. Then, as if by instinct she hid her lovely form as best as she might, leaving nothing exposed to the burning glances of Dasanana. She sat there in wild expectation of what may befall her, her eyes blinded with hot tears.

Meanwhile the lord of Lanka drew near and beheld Sita in the midst of her captors tossed to and fro by her over-mastering grief like a lordly vessel buffeted by heaving billows and slowly yielding herself to her fate. Seated on the bare earth without a single ornament or jewel, though fashioned by nature to lend the charm to the most precious and rarest of gems, her dirt and dust her only decoration, she sat there dim and dull of hue, even like a lotus-stalk caked with mud just revealing here and there a sign of its beauty. She could not clasp in her arms of flesh her beloved Rama, the soul of all things; but she yoked to the chariot of her mind the fleet-winged course of thought and was with him in a moment. Wan of face bedimmed with tears, lonely and friendless, she could find no time enough to bewail of her lord and contemplate his illimitable virtues. She knew not when the hour of her deliverance may strike; she knew not any other friend and protector except Raghava; he was her god, her lord, her hope here and hereafter.

The mate of the king of *Nagas* under the irresistible influence of potent spells and struggling vainly against her fate; the constellation Rohini in the cruel grip of Ketu; a bright ornament to a noble and virtuous house, but married to a man of low birth and mean habits; fair fame, bismerched by the leprous fingers of slander; the holy science of the *Vedas,* gradually decaying from disuse; bright renown on the wane; earnestness and faith sinking under the crushing blows of ridicule; service to the lord sinking under carelessness and neglect; hopes and desires barren of results; profits and gains far far below expectation; the commands of the master defied and set at naught; the quarters all ablaze at inauspicious moments; the articles of worship made away with by unholy hands; the lovely lotus blackened with the fire of frost; an army widowed of its braves; brilliance and glory darkened; a river whose bed is stranger to cool and refreshing waters; the sacred fire-place polluted by impure things; mighty flames sunk into ashes; the night of the Full Moon bereft of its queen in the cruel clutches of Rahu; a lotus pool in which mad elephants worked their will, tore up the stalks, trampled the flowers and frightened away the gentle birds; the sweet waters of a stream hustled away by the raging flood; the tender lotus uprooted and thrown on the ground, the fierce heat drinking up its life-waters; the lordly she-elephant driven away from the side of its mate and lashed firmly the strong posts and heaving hot sighs of impotent grief; thus and many a wise, did lady Sita impress the beholders of her long black braid like a forest glade lined with the helpless trees blackening under the grip of winter.

Long a stranger to bath or decorations, she shone not as she would, like the dark fortnight. Most delicately brought up, most delicately fashioned of form and limb, her home was rightly in palaces adorned with gold and gems. She was worn out to a shadow through fast and care, fear and constant meditation upon her beloved. Her heart a stranger to joy and water her only fare, she ever raised clasped hands of prayer to the deity of her choice that her Rama should lay low the cruel Ravana in battle. Of spotless purity of thought, word and deed, star-eyed and dark lashes to match them, she bewailed her fate in that, it delayed to bring to her side those who could and would deliver her from that cruel captivity.

And Ravana the wicked, sought to seduce her heart and cast a veil over her soul by soft and sweet words, glowing hopes and promises through which ran a vein of deceit and guile. But he thought and took the shortest way to his own ruin and extinction, for, he knew not that the lady Janaki followed the same law of life that Sri Rama set to himself and was torn with grief, being cruelly separated from his side.

CHAPTER 20

RAVANA ENTREATS SITA

HER husband was her lord and god; torn from his arms she was sick of heart even unto death, woe begone, spiritless; and her did Ravana desire to persuade to come to his side, by sweet speech and seductive words that thinly veiled his unholy purpose. But she was the gem of womanhood, the very soul of chastity and she could, if she willed, consume the entire creation to ashes with the fire of her spiritual greatness.

"Life of my life, whose shapely thighs shame utterly the trunk of the lordly elephant! At the bare sight of my unlucky self you cover yourself and shrink as if to vanish from my view. Ah, how lovely are your eyes and large! How perfect and auspiciously fashioned are your limbs! What charms have you in your self that you would draw out to your feet, the hearts and souls of all created beings? I have lost my soul unto you. I entreat you to have pity upon me, else I die. What terror possesses you at the sight of myself? I see none hereabouts, men or *rakshasas* that could take any form at will, to inspire this unspeakable dread and horror in your heart. Take it from me as a truth, that it is a natural instinct and law among *rakshasas*, to take unto themselves the women from the homes of others by force if necessary. Nay, doubt it not. But do you not see that I wish such an advantage over others, do put an iron restraint upon my nature. For, I will not lay an unwilling hand upon you; but wait till love draws you unto myself. And it must be such a love as defies time and space and holds nothing higher than itself.

(The reader must be reminded here that Ravana makes a virtue of necessity. He wants to impress her with a sense of the noble nature of his love to her. He would not force her; he would win her love and wait for it until the crack of dome. But this is utterly hollow. When he laid violent hands upon the heavenly nymph, Punjikasthala, Brahma laid a dread curse upon him that his head would be shattered to pieces if he dared to repeat this heinous sin; and that was the real reason of his apparent forbearance towards Sita).

Oh! thou barely in human shape! What see you here to cause even a flutter of fear in you? Believe me; let your heart lean against me in utter confidence. I pray for the hour when it will glow with real unalterable love. Let not vain grief and sorrow find a way to your heart and waste this matchless grace and loveliness.

It ill-becomes you, this single braid of your wealth of wavy locks; this bed of hard and uneven earth; this single garment of yours ragged and dirty; and this meaningless fast that you so rigidly and cruelly impose upon yourself. Come to my arms, as your love and husband; flowers, chaplets, garlands, perfumes, scents, priceless robes, rich ornaments, royal beds, song, dance, choicest meat and drink, in fact, everything that the fourteen worlds hold towards the ministration of our wants and fancies, is yours to do as you like. Alas! why will you not do so? Rarest gem that ever shone on the crest of perfect womanhood! What fate adverse prevents your perfect limbs from lending a charm and beauty to fitting ornaments? How could it be that you do not deserve to be adorned with the choicest and the best gifts of nature and art, once that you have come to me? Believe me when I say that it is easier for the steam of water to go back to its source than for your peerless youth and beauty to come back to you. Nay, its hours are counted. Come to my arms ere it is too late and seek love and happiness therein.

I almost conclude that the Fashioner of this universe created you and in utter despair gave up his art and exclaimed, "Now it is utterly beyond me to bring forth a more glorious form than this." And the most convincing proof of it is that the worlds do not hold a woman who could even stand as second best to you in form and grace. I challenge any one to produce a person who has once gazed upon your youth and beauty and not lost his heart and soul to you. Why, the very Fashioner of yourself has not yet got back his heart that you robbed him of. Oh! Thou fair of face even as the moon in orb! Wherever my eyes chance to rest upon your dazzling loveliness, I find it an utter impossibility to tear them away from it. Sita! Be my wife; what spell clouds your heart? I have brought from the countless worlds everything that is best in the shape of woman; and you shall be their queen and ruler. May all good be thine. I have gone through the worlds above and below and my capital holds everything rare and choicest that they hold. They, my humble self and this lordly Lanka are yours. Or shall I win this broad earth for your father Janaka, to rule over?

The countless worlds hold not any one who could stand by my side in the matter of strength, valour, courage and prowess. Times out of count have I worsted in dire battle, the gods and the *asuras;* and annihilated their hosts, cut down their banners and flags and driven them before me like a huge flock of sheep. Expert women decorators shall vie with one another to adorn you with garments and ornaments as becomes your beauty and grace of form. And it shall give me boundless delight. Robes, jewels, meat and drink, seats, vehicles, and everything in the way of luxury and comfort that your heart calls for, shall be yours to enjoy as you like. Give away without stint to those who find favour in your eyes, broad lands and boundless wealth. Wherever your eye may chance to light upon, everything within its range shall be your bounden slaves; and they are yours to do or undo as you like. Through you, your kith and kin shall find favour in my eyes and want for nothing.

What clouds your eyes from beholding as it is, my wealth, magnificence and fame? With nothing to cover his nakedness, hungry and starving, with no stone to lay his head upon, helpless and miserable, a ranger of the woods, what benefits you by your Rama whom you foolishly cling to. Is he a meet mate for you, this puny mortal driven from his home with contempt, clad in the bark of trees and the skin of beasts, the hard earth his bed, the wild beasts his companions and with but scant food to stay his hunger like the hermits and recluses? The Goddess of power and victory have turned their backs upon him. Verily he might have been gathered to his fathers by this time. Long lines of cranes fly in crowds ahead of dark rain-clouds and blot from view the fair moonlight; even so, it is utterly impossible that Rama should come upon you here, brought over by myself and placed in the watchful care of my guards. In the far past, the mighty Hiranyakasipu, was engaged in hard austerities in the woods; and his wife was big with child. Indra guessed rightly that the son born to him would be more terrible than the father and sought to kill it. But he stayed his hands at the advice of Narada. Even so, how could Rama get you back from me?

Like unto a lordly serpent in the talons of Garuda, my heart is turned to water at the sight of your lovely eyes, bright teeth, brilliant smile and a thousand and one graces of form and movement. I behold you clad in your single garment of silk, dirty and ragged; your lovely body is wasted with fasting; no jewels or ornaments grace your limbs. Your splendour is clouded; yet, my heart turns to you alone. It could not bring itself to find the light in the company of my numerous wives. Believe me, my harem holds galaxy- bright womanhood that the worlds boast of. Be thou their queen and goddess. The heavenly nymphs wait upon Mahalakshmi; even so, the best and fairest of women in all worlds shall wait upon you.

The entire wealth of Kubera and of numerous worlds and my humble self lie in the palm of your hands. What stays you from doing with these as you like? Do you think for a moment that Rama comes within an appreciable distance of me, in the matter of austerities, strength of body, valour, renown, fame or wealth? Drink of the choicest of wines, disport thyself as fancy dictates, in the woods and gardens; taste of every delight and joy that you find here; for, I hereby make over unto you this broad earth and everything that it holds. Lose thyself in a dream of bliss with me; let your kith and kin come to you and realize all their desires; cast away fear from your heart. Adorn yourself with robes and ornaments and let us range for endless years through the woods that fringe the shores of the sea, in their beauty of many coloured flowers and the black bees that hang around them."

CHAPTER 21

SITA'S REPLY

THUS spake Ravana, cruel of deed and wicked of purpose. And Sita with a heavy heart answered him soft and slow, tortured with the grief of separation from her husband, his image ever before her, crying her eyes out, her swollen body trembled in affright at the sight of Ravana whom the worlds held in dread. But her whole self was centred in Rama. She offered herself at his gracious feet with ceaseless devotion; she swerved not by a hair from the perfect ideal of noble wifehood. So, she cast between herself and her tormentor, a piece of straw and with a bright smile upon her lips, met his arguments one and all.

"Ravana! Cast away from your heart the desire for my poor self and place it where it is due in your lawful wives. The worst of sinners dare not raise his eyes to the bliss of heaven. I was born in the line of the Videha kings to whom the mystery of Brahman was an open book. I was married in the race of the Sun whose spotless purity of heart and life was a household word. Sri Rama, the lord and master of the worlds above and below, is my wedded husband. Never have I, even in my wildest dreams, clouded my heart with the thought of another man. Shall I soil myself with a black deed of shame that the lowest and the most abandoned of men turn away with contempt from? I am a devoted wife; I am the wife of another; I am no meet wife for you; let me go; follow in the footsteps of the great and the good. Now I will apply the rule to yourself and ask you "Do you not watch your wives with jealous care, that even the slightest breath of heaven may not visit their faces? Even so, other husbands guard their wives from the lustful eyes of others. Do you hold it wrong?

Why cannot you bring yourself to find happiness and delight in the arms of your wives, who love you, heart and soul and are ready to carry out your slightest wishes? If a man finds no delight in the company of his wives, if he allows lust to blind his eyes and rob him of his senses, if he runs after the wives of others, it may seem to him at that time, very good and healthy; but take it from me that in the end it will blast his life, his health, his spiritual lustre, his wife and children and his hopes hereafter.

Am I right in concluding that this kingdom of yours holds no one to offer you, wise and healthy counsel? Is there none to stay your hand from perpetrating foul injustice? I should wrong Vibhishana, Malyavan and others if I say so. So shall I decide that you have not waited upon them, touched their feet in humble reverence and drank of the fountain of wisdom and duty?

Well may you ask me "How could you know of it, who came here a short time ago." The most damning evidence of it is the wicked bend of your heart. You may ask me "You cannot read my heart; for, I do not carry it upon my sleeve. Then, how do you pretend to guess my intent and purpose?" Well, your foul desires and unclean life is proof enough; it is condemned by the great and the good. Now, look here, do you fondly believe that your deeds will dog your footsteps alone and bring them to ruin and perdition? Alas! the entire *rakshasa*-world that waits upon you is doomed beyond all hope. You have made them believe that you are their best protector and benefactor; but, your heart is set upon their annihilation; that is why you cast behind you the golden counsel of the good. Destruction awaits the kingdom and the people who are cursed with a king who is foolish of heart and ever prone to deeds of evil. Even so, this Lanka and the countless millions of *rakshasas* that lead happy lives therein in peace and plenty, are made over to dire ruin and damnation; and all through you, who is ever wedded to the paths of dark and foul deeds. All beings will rejoice utterly at the sight of him who had been guilty of frightful crimes through carelessness and indiscretion and reaps the fruits thereof. Even so, these poor innocent subjects of yours, whom you have meanly deceived, will lift their voice in joy and exclaim "At last this monster of cruelty, this Ravana, has, thanks to the eternal justice of the gods, found his place in the deepest and the darkest hells."

Are you gone so far in madness as to think that your wealth and power is anything in my eyes? Seek you to bribe me thereby? The lordship over the women of your harem is, in your estimation, the height of ambition for a woman. Is it within the range of possibility to separate me from the side of Mahavishnu, who has come down in the line of Raghu to bring peace and good to the world? Where he takes birth, there you will find me; for, I am Mahalakshmi, his eternal consort. Have you ever heard of the glorious Lord of day divorced of his radiance? I am the dutiful wife of Rama. And as the sun is magnified through his rays, I am the source of his greatness. Have you forgot so soon the lesson that Maricha taught you, that boundless is the splendour of him whom the daughter of Janaka takes for her husband. The Ancient of days, the four-faced Brahma and the hosts of the Shining Ones that rank below him, seek the feet of my lord to attain to their present greatness. I sit for ever on his right. I rest within the fond embrace of his mighty arms. I sleep upon his breast. Such a one is the source of your power, might, wealth and fame, though you know it not. Else, you are a straw caught in a strong gale and blown to the uttermost corners of this earth. You are unknown to name and fame. And you fondly hope that I, even I, would seek your side and lay my head on your crime-stained arms? The wise one, who has reached the bounds of knowledge and perfection through long ages of austerities and meditation, deserves the highest gifts that the *yoga* path has in its power to give. Even so, I am the meet consort of Sri Rama. I am Mahalakshmi and he is Mahavishnu. Ravana! I tell you once more, for your good and safety, that I am no meet wife for any other. I cannot and I will not keep my hold on life apart from him. It is an act of justice and kindness to bring back the young she-elephant to the side of its mate. And you will do the wisest act of your life if you beseech Sri Rama to come over here and lead me to him. Ravana! know you not that the cleverest thief must touch the earth with his feet if he should carry on his foul trade. So, should you desire a place in this world, I could not give you a better advice to secure it than to seek the good graces of my lord.

Should you say "Welcome is death and ruin than to take back life at the hands of my foe"; even then, you have no other to grant your prayer and wish than he. Do not delude yourself with fond hopes that he will let you have an easy and peaceful death even then. No, you will be made to live on. You will be made to pray for the death and forgetfulness that will never come to you. You will see your sons, your kith, your kin, your subjects, your generals and your armies done to death cruelly before your very eyes. And then you will die the death of a thousad tortures. So, take my advice and seek refuge in him.

You ask "How do I know that he grants me peace and protection if I follow your advice?" I will render you meet reply and say "See you not that this noblest of men has put away behind him all the cruel injustice you have done him? He will hold it as a pleasure and honor to him, should he be called upon to forgive you and do you all the good that your heart may desire. So, seek you the way to calm his anger. Believe me, I will aid you to my utmost and join my prayers to yours. There are no bounds to his love towards such as take shelter with him. You need not go so far. It is even quite enough to melt his heart and put out the fires of his wrath, if you will, with a clean and repentant heart, lead me to his side.

But, should you put away my well-meant advice, a cruel and shameful death awaits you. It is possible for one to escape from the *vajra* of Indra; it is possible for one to escape the Rod of Death; but, should Rama's heart blaze with wrath against you and he, the Lord of the worlds, where can you cover your diminished head? Very soon shall you hear the twang of his mighty bow, terrible as the bolt discharged from the hands of Indra at which the quarters of the earth shriek in affright. Very soon shall you behold the arrows of Rama and Lakshmana, finely joined and coursing through the air like Serpents of doom emitting fierce flames from their mouths. They will hide from you, this city of yours, with their winged eagle plumes and drink the heart-blood of countless millions of your *rakshasas*.

Have you seen the lord Garuda dart down into the depths of this ocean and fly away with huge sea-serpents? Even so, Sri Rama, the great Garuda, will tear to shreads the serpent-brood of the *rakshasas*. Have you heard that Mahavishnu, in the far past, strode over the worlds in three steps and brought back fair Fame from the *asuras*. Even so, my lord will lay you low in battle dire and take me back to his side. Have I forgot that your heart quaked with fear at the sight of the fourteen thousand *rakshasa*-heroes consumed to ashes in the short space of a *muhurta* at Janasthana? Have I forgot that you, like a mean thief as you were, like a coward as you were, waited for the moment when my mighty protectors would leave the cottage? Have I forgot that you made away with me by stealth, afraid to face those heroes in fair fight? Tell me if a mean low cur can bear to breathe in the atmosphere of the tiger? Even so, you cannot dream of breathing the same air with those lordly lions. Why speak of coming within their ken and escaping with life? Let me call back to your memory the far off incident when the mighty *asura* Vritra was shorn of his right arm by the *vajra* of Indra and stood helpless before the lord of the *devas,* who had full count of his arms to fight with. Even so, you can never hope to raise your eyes to meet the stern and piercing gaze of my lord Rama and his brother, no less mighty than himself. Death, and cruel death is your portion doubtless. The fierce rays of the noon-day sun scorch away in a moment the shallow waters of the slender rivulet. Even so, my lord and his brother Lakshmana will make their arrows slake their thirst with your heart's blood. Nay, do your best. Seek a hiding place with your brother, the Lord of riches. Seek refuge in Mahakailasa where abides the great Mahadeva, to whom you offer worship. Or, dive down to the worlds below and hide your cowardly head in the watery realms of lord Varuna. You will find that the arrows of Rama are there before you, waiting to do you to death by slow and cruel torture. An old and lofty tree that has lived its time and has gone rotten through and through can it escape from the flaming bolts of Indra!"

CHAPTER 22

RAVANA COERCES SITA

HER looks make all creation rejoice and feel themselves supremely blessed. And this lady Sita spoke the stern truth to the very face of Ravana, undaunted by his might and cruel face. But, he brooked not her words winged with flame and gave way to wrath.

"I have observed during a pretty long life that whenever a man puts himself out to draw the heart of a woman unto himself and speaks to her, words of persuasion ever so gently, they make a barren return for all his pains. The more he tries to reconcile them, the more they turn towards him proud hearts and looks of scorn. A skilful driver brings the runaway horse under control, slowly but surely. Even so, my boundless love to you keeps under restraint my anger. Verily, it is strange beyond all thought, this wayward course of love. Lo! affection and compassion grow apace in our hearts towards the object of our love; but, we turn a blind eye to its defects and dangers. So, I should most naturally and most justly put you to shame and inflict a lingering death of torture upon you, who still keeps afresh the memory of Rama, the prince of hypocrites; but, also! my heart rebels against the very thought. Every word that you had dared to utter to my very face, deserves instant death by cruel and fiendish torture. Well, two short months are left to you, of the twelve that I gave you for taking counsel with yourself; should you fail to come to my arms by that time, my cooks have my commands to prepare you for my breakfast the very next day". And he roared like dark thunder clouds shot with cruel lightnings.

The countless ladies from the worlds of the *devas* and *gandharvas,* most cruelly torn away from happy homes and fond hearts, recalled the dark memories of their cruel fate. So, they throbbed with sympathy and kindness to Sita who was passing through the same valley of fear and tribulations. They shot secret glances and kind, at Sita and encouraged her silently to hit back. "Poor girl! fear not. This sinful wretch can do you no evil". Some put out their lips; others egged her on by meaningful winks, yet others made bold nod of their approval. The lady Sita failed not to note it; she took courage. Her natural sense of utter loyalty and love towards her husband and the consciousness of the boundless might and power of Sri Rama impelled her to entirely ignore him and his vain words. And she set herself to show him the path to peace, honour and happiness.

"Ravana! I feel certain beyond doubt that your broad realms hold no one who can turn your heart away from this evil course and place your steps on the path of rectitude and virtue. Every mother's son that feeds at your table and sleeps under your roofs but hard words, thoughts of treachery and evil to you. I am no less than the lady Sachi the best beloved of the Lord of the *devas;* and there is no other fool that ever dreams of raising his eyes to me with unholy thoughts. Alas! you have committed yourself beyond hope, to escape from his wrath. Have you not spoken these words all unholy, to her who lies next to his heart? Have you ever heard that there was any doubt about the end of a duel between the maddened elephant in the jungles and the puny hare in his hole? But, do not fool yourself with the fond belief that I mean your worthless self when I spoke of the lordly elephant. Nay, it is my lord Rama and none other. And you are that atom of a hare. Your royal pride and dignity did not blench from waiting like a paltry thief until he was enticed away from the cottage by your mean devise. You did not hesitate to steal me away from it like a hungry cur. Has nature forgot to bless you with the least spark of shame? Alas! you know not how much I regret that it was not given you to stand before my Lord in his terrible wrath.

It is to me utterly inexplicable why your cruel and ugly eyes fell not, scorched to ashes, the very moment they dared to raise themselves to the face of another woman in shameless lust. The daughter-in-law of king Dasaratha, the soul of right, and the beloved wife of Sri Rama, the incarnation of virtue and uprightness, I never thought of another man even in my wildest dreams; and yet, you dare to utter words of foul lust to me! Do you know why your wretched tongue did not rot off then and there? Rama has never given me permission to curse any one that doeth grievous evil unto me. And I ever guard, with devotion and care, my wifely loyalty and purity. While my lord is there to look after me, my heart can never dare to put him by and punish those who are the just objects of his wrath. That is why the fire of my anger has not reduced you to dust and ashes ere now.

Do you think it is in any way possible to steal me from the side of Sri Rama, of matchless intellect? Do not delude yourself with the fond hope that your unholy thoughts were not known to him. The Fates have decreed that I should lead you to the gates of Death; that explains the situation most clearly. Doubt it not. Lift not your heart in haughty pride that you planned so cleverly to spirit me away from my cottage. You are the hero of a thousand battles; you are the next born to Kubera; countless myriads obey your behests in war; and with all these, you have to explain why you were driven to the necessity of practising foul deceit upon my protectors and made away with me, like a mean spirited cur as you are."

Thus did Sita deliver herself of her message of winged wrath and scorn. Ravana the terrible, rolled his eyes about in anger and flashed looks of frightful import upon her. Black of hue as the banked storm-clouds; of mighty shoulders like unto lofty mountain peaks; strong of limb and proud of gait like the monarch of the forests; with flaming eyes and tongue, his crown towered aloft with waving plumes, and heightened by contrast, the splendour of his garlands of curious workmanship the many coloured pastes of intricate patterns, across his huge breast his garments of bright scarlet and his armlets, wristlets and other ornaments of gold and gems. A heavy chain encircled his waist, black as the serpent Vasuki that wound itself round the mountain Mandara when it churned in the days of yore, the ocean of milk for the nectar of immortality. His shoulders shone from afar, like the two snow-clad peaks of the same mountain. Like unto a hill glorious in its woods of bright red flowers and shoots, his ears blazed with rings that deluded one into the belief that they were two resplendant morning suns. He looked the very incarnation of Spring; he was decked in every manner that the brain of man could conceive. With all this, he was hideous to behold and repulsive, even as a crematorium.

He stared hard for a while at Sita, his eyes blazing red with wrath and then hissed forth like the serpent of Death. "Your heart is not ashamed to cling to that worm of a Rama who has nothing to lose in the world and who is outside the pale of law and justice. Well, you deserve nothing better than instant death at my hands, like unto the rising sun drinking the red blood of life of the morning twilight."

The lord of Lanka, the holy terror of his foes, turned to the *rakshasi*-guards whose looks were enough to turn into stone whom they happened to rest upon and roared an order to them.

Now, one of them delighted in a single eye; another boasted of a lonely ear; another covered her huge head with her ear; yet others were blessed with ears like those of the elephant, the cow, the horse and other beasts; another had her ears trailing behind her; and there was one who was utterly innocent of any such appendage at all. Some had their feet fashioned after those of elephants, horses and cattle. One of them thought that she could get through life with a single leg; another was content with a leg of most monstrous dimensions; but the cleverest of the lot was she, who dispensed with any such useless article. Some had heads and neck out of all proportions; some had their breasts and stomach huge beyond description; some had their mouths and eyes awfully wide like the gates of hell. There was a beauty whose tongue lolled down after her like a flaming serpent. Her friend thought her beneath notice, for, she would never think of troubling herself with one. There were other queens of beauty and grace, some with flat faces that were utter strangers to what is known as a nose. There were some whose faces resembled those of a lion, or a boar, or a cow.

Ravana cried to them : "My orders are upon your heads and eyes that you turn her heart towards me in fond love; and that, as soon as possible. Speak to her kindly; speak to her in anger; speak to her in peace; entice her heart by glorious promises; draw her away from the side of her husband. In short, use every means high and low, fair and foul, except actual physical coercion; and keep it as the last resource, should the others fail utterly." He wreaked his anger upon her and relieved his heart overwrought with lust and impotent rage by seeking to overawe his victim again and again.

Then, Dhanyamali, one of his favourite queens, drew near him, cast her flower-soft arms round his mighty shoulders and exclaimed laughingly. "Lord of the universe! I challenge you to mortal combat in the lists where Beauty reigns; and Love and its delights are the prize of victory. I am painfully surprised that you should even waste a thought upon this puny creature who is no better than a mortal woman and that, with a heart that loathes the very thought of you. See you not that she is pale as Death and hideously deformed? What would you do with her? See you not that the Fates have never written upon her forehead a single letter that would ensure her the unhindered enjoyment of everything that your might and power can give? You know full well that it saps the life-currents of a person if he should yearn after a woman that loves him not; but, boundless bliss and inconceivable delights are his, should he seek the arms of one who has set her heart upon him."

Dhanyamali did not wait for a reply, but dragged him away from the spot. This changed the current of Ravana's thoughts. His mighty brows, drawn down in wrath, grew smooth. He roared with laughter, like peels of thunder issuing from storm-clouds. The earth quaked with affright utterly unable to bear his huge weight. He disappeared behind the gates of his palace, like the blazing sun behind the Mountains of sunset. There followed in his train the ladies of his harem, transplanted from the worlds of the *devas*, the *gandharvas* and the *nagas*.

And so did Ravana haughtily overbear the innocent and helpless Sita, who, though trembling with fear, would not let go her hold upon her wifely fidelity and purity. With a heart sick of foul lust and hot impure desires, he took his way to his wondrous palace.

CHAPTER 23

THE DEMON-GUARDS ADVISE SITA

THUS did Ravana take his way back to his harem; and the *rakshasis* drew near Sita as commanded thereunto. They lashed themselves into a fit of fury and spoke words of cruel import to the delicate lady. "Sita! He who would take you to his side as his queen, our lord Ravana, does he seem in your eyes one of the mortal crowd that walks the earth? The grandson of the holy Pulastya, one of Patriarchs; the holy terror of his foes; unparalleled of intellect and intelligence; resplendant with his ten crowned heads; the lord of the myriads of *rakshasas* that range the worlds; and *he* does not loom large in your eyes." Thus spoke one of them.

Then, she, glorying in the epithet 'Single braid' addressed herself unto the lady Sita, slender of waist, and hissed at her unwelcome advice, the flames darting from her eyes of fiery red. "The lord Brahma, the Ancient of Days, brought forth, of his will, the Patriachs Marichi, Atri, Angiras, Pulastya, Pulaha and Kratu. The fourth of them begot Visravas of shining lustre; and this son of will and *yoga* stood on a level in greatness with his grandsire. And his son is no other than Ravana, the lord of the *rakshasas*. The heart of his enemies turn into water at his sight; and they cry out for mercy and dear life. Now, I know that you are a fitting spouse to that proud monarch. Do my words, so true and so beneficial, find no way to your heart. It is a mystery to me."

Then another lady, by name Harijata (yellow-braid), rolled her eyes, that reminded one of a torch in wild rage, and cried (and this beauty boasted of cat eyes). "Take it from me as gospel truth that, you and no other are the meet wife of the ruler of the *rakshasas*, who drove before him, like sheep, the thirty crores of gods and Indra, their king."

Then Praghasa, another of the lot, could not contain herself. She rushed at Sita with blind insensate anger and made her tremble with affright as she roared "Our Lord, the king is the gem of valour, brave, victor of a thousand fights, strong and mighty beyond compare — what madness has come over you that your heart does not turn to him as your lord and master? And then, his prowess, his courage! See you not that he would not even waste a thought upon our queen Mandodari, whose beauty, grace and loveliness entitle her to be the jewel of womanhood? See you not that his heart is drawn to you and to no other? Our queen is his consort by choice and by right. She is the auspicious fountain from which springs all his greatness, all his glory and all his fame. She is quite competent to ravish his heart in every way. And lo, his senseless passion for your worthless self makes him clean ignore her very existence! They, the lovely stars that grace the bright firmament of his harem, find no place in his heart or memory. So, let me tell you, in all confidence, that you have no rival to fear."

And then, Vikata took her turn and said, "The hero who put to flight, times out of count, the embattled hosts of the *devas,* the *gandharvas,* the *nagas* and the *danavas,* has, by a strange freak of fortune, come to you, even to you, a weak and puny mortal woman, and pours forth his prayers to you. Do you see, in the worlds above and below, any one that stands next to him in wealth, power or intellect? Fie, fie upon your incredible stupidity that would not seek your place by his side! Verily, this is what the Fates reserve only for their greatest favourites."

But Durmukhi put her behind and hissed forth 'Fool! fool! the Lords of day and night, the Lords of air and fire tremble with affright at the sound of his name. The Lord of the burning rays must, perforce, shine with only that much of heat as suits our lord Ravana. The Lord of air dares not move, should Ravana not like it. Why, the very trees must, whether they will or no, shower flowers of bright hue and fragrance, at his least thought, in season or out of season. The mountains, the clouds and every object of creation should perform his behests instantly; and it seems to you a slight thing to be the darling wife of the monarch of *rakshasas* who is the lord and director of this boundless universe. Oh, of matchless beauty of form and face! We have advised you to your best and we have no more to say. Take it to your heart aright and act accordingly. And, should you fail to do so, death, cruel and instant, awaits you."

CHAPTER 24

THE RAKSHASIS TERRORISE SITA

THEN, those terrible *rakshasi*-guards, hard of heart, closed round Sita and began all at once to pierce her with cruel words and unpleasant. "It is a wonder why you do not pray to become the queen of the harem of Ravana, where stand in beautiful array, couches, lounges, seats, and diwans of various and priceless workmanship. Believe me when I tell you that it is just what becomes you whose grace of form and feature ravish the hearts of all beings. It is plain that a mortal woman like you should aspire to be the wife of a mortal. Put away the puny Rama from your heart. It is a dead certainty that you will never take your place by him as his spouse. Seek the arms of Ravana, the monarch of the *rakshasas,* at whose feet lie the wealth of the three worlds and take your fill of joy and happiness. Lo! your Rama has been hounded out of his kingdom, wealth, luxury, and comfort; he has lost all; and, to crown these, his heart is turned to water at the mere thought of Ravana; and this insignificant creature is the burden of your praise and eulogy. Nay, it is but natural and just, for, you are at best, a mortal."

To which did Sita give energetic reply, though her fast-falling tears belied her courage. "The advice that you singly and collectively offer me, of course with the best of intentions, sound horrible in my ears. I wonder, on the other hand, why they do not strike you as utterly sinful and worthy of scorn and contempt, even from the meanest object of creation. Just tell me this. Is it in the nature of things that a mortal woman should mate with a *rakshasa?* Well, do with me as you please. My body is yours to injure, to torture, to eat; but, my soul you cannot touch; and it cries out in horror upon your infamous proposals. Rich or poor, king or beggar, my Rama is all in all to me; he is the husband of my choice; hence, worthy of my utmost devotion and love and respect; you should not wonder that he is, in my eyes, the Perfect Man. The lady Suvarchala ever follows the foot-steps of her husband the Lord of day; and I but take after her in loving my lord and following him to the gates of Eternity. Nay, Indrani and Indra, Arundhati and Vasishtha, Rohini and Chandra, Lopamudra and Agastya, Sukanya and Chyavana, Savitri and Satyavan, Madayanti and Saudasa, Srimati and Kapila, Kesini and Sagara, Damayanti and Nala, Indumati and Aja, sparkle on the stretched fore-finger of all Time as rare gems of married life. And I too, in my humble way, delight in having found favour in the eyes of my lord and husband, the best and foremost of the race of Raghu."

These words almost took the *rakshasis* off their feet with wrath; they reminded themselves of the orders laid upon them by Ravana and struck terror into the heart of the lady Sita by their words of cruel import. And Hanuman, from his leafy hiding place on high, was carefully watching this strange scene. The *rakshasis* hemmed round the lady Sita who was trembling with fear. They licked their lips hanging like tongues of flame and cried, "Verily, this wretch deserves not, in the least, to sit by the side of Ravana, the lord of the *rakshasas*," and they rushed at her with their toma hawks swung aloft.

Sita felt her courage too weak too resist this slow and insidious torture. Tears of agony blinded her eyes; she took her way slowly to the tree in the branches of which Hanuman had taken shelter and dropped down at the foot of it, limp and nerveless. Yet, the *rakshasis* followed her there : it mattered nothing to them that she was clad in dust-stained garment of dull hue and that her face was wan with grief. They did not abate a jot of their cruelties and terrors. One of them, Vinata by name, had a stomach that towered like a hill and eyes that struck terror into the hearts of those that she looked at. And this gentle lady shook with wrath as she cried. "Sita! We have had enough of your blessed husband and the love and devotion to him that you throw at our face. Know you not that extremes are ever dangerous? The golden mean is the path of safety. Nay, we applaud your wifely devotion and loyalty, for, it becomes you as a mortal woman. But you have done your duty to the best of your lights. You must draw the line there. Now, give heed unto my counsel; and everything good and great and glorious will be yours to command. The lord Ravana has, in the hollow of his hand, the lives and fortunes of the *rakshasa* millions; he is valour personified.

The God of love and beauty pales into insignificance by his side. He is an expert in everything that a man aspires to know or to do. The poor and the needy find in him a matchless giver. He charms the eyes and the hearts of those that look upon him. He is to us what Indra is to the *devas*. And such a one is the fittest spouse that you could ever dream of. Make your heart an utter stranger to even a passing memory of Rama. Centre your life and aspirations upon our Ravana. Priceless jewels, ornaments of strange and lovely workmanship, garments worked with gold, silver and gems, garlands, chaplets, scents, perfumes, nay, everything, that mind can conceive of comfort and luxury, will be yours; and you will reign the sole ruler of the countless worlds above and below. Why, Sachi, the wife of Indra and Svaha, the spouse of Agni, cannot hold a candle to you. What have you to do with or gain by this Rama of yours, whose life counts but a span? Now, should you fail to take our counsel unto your heart and follow it inplicitly, you die this instant, and we will make a meal of your carcass."

Next followed the lovely Vikata of hanging breasts. She clenched her upraised fists with fury and rushed upon Sita. "Wretch, obstinate and ill-advised! Our lord Ravana, most strangely puts up with all the words of scorn that your lips dared to give expression to, only because you are delicate of limb and he has lost his heart to you; that accounts for his tolerance and tenderness. We, as you see, have done the best for you in giving you safe and homely advice befitting the time and place. And, should you hesitate to follow it utterly, you perish this moment. This *asoka* grove is within the palace grounds of Ravana. The city Lanka is like a bright gem set in the silver sea that is practically pathless on all sides. *Rakshasas* of terrible mien and might guard it ever. And last, but not the least, we keep you in our midst. Do you think that Indra, the lord of the thunder-bolt, commits the folly of even dreaming to rescue you from your fate? Now, look here. See you not that I counsel you to your best? Follow me in blind faith; waste not your heart with barren grief; stain not your lovely cheeks with bitter tears; these will not stead you in the least, nay, not the slightest. It ill becomes you to give yourself over to dark melancholy and cruel grief without taking your right place in the heart of Ravana and spending your short life in a dream of bliss. And you know but too well, that in that short span, the charm and loveliness of youth is but a fleeting shadow. Take time by the forelock and crowd happiness and joy into your life, ere that shadow fades away. Drink of the choicest wines in the company of Ravana; roam like a bird through the lovely groves, glades, gardens, woods, forests, hill and dale. Thousands, four and three, of *rakshasa* ladies stand at your feet and call. So, seek the love of Ravana and reign as his queen. But, should you put away this, my well-meant advice, I pluck your heart out by its roots and reserve it as choice delicacy."

Then came after her Chandodari, brandishing a huge trident; her eyes shot forth burning sparks of wrath as she roared at Sita. "The fawn-like eyes, and the lovely breasts trembling with affright, of this obstinate girl make my mouth water; I can no longer contain myself. I have set my heart upon having, as a *bon-bon,* her liver, her spleen and fleshy morsel above it, her heart with the connecting blood vessels, her entrails and the juicy brain matter."

But Praghasa brushed her aside and cried, "Not so, this is a very wicked girl. We shall wring her neck off. Why waste your breath upon her? We will take the news to Ravana that the mortal woman he brought over here died of grief; and he will, of a truth, give us leave to eat her."

Ajamukhi interrupted her and said, "This creature is not worth wrangling about. We will kill her outright and share equally. Fetch me choice drinks and condiments to flavour the meal."

Surpanaka (not the sister of Ravana) set the seal upon the discussion and said, "I vote for Ajamukhi; we will drown our sorrows in wine and dance round the goddess that has her shrine in the Nikumbila grove."

Thus terrorised most cruelly by the *rakshasis,* lady Sita gave herself up to despair and wept most bitterly.

CHAPTER 25

SITA IN HER GRIEF

THESE cruel words of the merciless *rakshasi*-guards made Sita weep aloud. Then, her voice shaken with fear and tears, she spoke back to them, spiritedly. "It is outside the range of all possibility that a woman of the human species should become the spouse of a *rakshasa*. I cannot stay your hand from killing me as you like. But, you have my last word upon it that I will never, never bend my heart to your views."

Yet, she shook in abject fear, like a meek-eyed fawn chased by wolves and driven far far away from her friends. Like unto the daughters of the bright *devas,* Janaki brooded over the horrible threats of Ravana, the cruel words of the *rakshasis* and the unaccountable neglect of Rama and Lakshmana. Her grief was too much for her; and she almost shrunk within herself through despair. She grasped a bow of the *simsupa* tree in which Hanuman lay hid; and wan with grief at being torn from the arms of Rama, she said to herself feebly, "Hopes have I none of blessing my eyes with a sight of my lord." But nature and habit brought back his recollection to her. Her fast flowing tears drenched her all over. Her heart could never put away his image; and she tottered like a fair ship out of sight of land and in the cruel grip of a storm. She trembled like a delicate plantain uprooted by the wild gale. Her senses were confused by the cruel taunts of her demon-guards and her face turned wan and lifeless. Her braid long and broad trembled too and gave one the impression of a black cobra darting all around. Her heart, sore from the grief of being torn from the arms of Rama, was further tortured by the cruel taunts of her demon guards and her face turned wan and lifeless. Her heart was further tortured by the cruel words of the *rakshasis* and she lost her hold upon herself. Heavy sobs almost tore her heart in twain; her tears flowed without restraint as she gave voice to her hopeless grief.

"Ha, Rama! Woe is me" And again when her heart was felt with grief "Ha, Rama! Lakshmana! Kausalya, the mother of my beloved! Sumitra, wise and loving!" And again when cruel Fate dealt her another stroke "Alas! How is it that I keep my hold on life even for a moment, thus cruelly tortured by the *rakshasis,* torn from the arms of my Rama and a prey to sorrows inexpressible? The wise say true that a man or woman cannot quit the body that they have taken, a moment later or earlier than what *karma* has fixed for them. Like a stately ship buffetted by adverse winds, slowly sinking beneath the waves in mid ocean, I am about to lose hold upon this body, all through the evil *karma* of my past lives. Like the broadening flood that eats away into the banks on either side, sharp grief is gradually drinking away my life-breaths, without the slightest hope of ever beholding my beloved, of matchless beauty and grace : and in the cruel grip of these frightful demons. Verily, blessed are they beyond compare and of untold merit, to whom it is given to behold my lord Raghuvira at this moment, with eyes broad and lovely as the blown red lotus, his gait lordly and proud as that of a lion in his might; and bask in the light of his presence, who has ever a radiant smile and a kind word for everyone; and counts as great, even the slightest benefit, be it in thought, word or deed. But most unfortunate am I in that, it is not given to me, the wedded wife of that great soul. His life is not worth a moment's purchase of him who drinks of the deadliest of poisons. Even so, I have no right to live even an instant, torn from the arms of that perfect man to whom that mystery of things is an open book. Terrible indeed must be the cumulated evil deeds of my past lives, in that they have borne this fruit and made me a prey to every shade of grief, misery, sorrow and despair. Ah! Is there any hope, nay the slightest, of these eyes ever resting themselves on the god-like features of my lord, hemmed as I am by these demons of frightful visage and cruel heart? So, I decide that the better course is to seek refuge in the arms of Death from this ocean of troubles. Alas! Fie upon this life of the mortals. Death in any form is most welcome to me at present. But the scriptures lay their ban upon it and hold before us the terrors of the hells hereafter. Well, it seems after all, that one could do nothing better than patiently bear all the ills that flesh is heir to. Alas! the wife has no body of her own; it is her lord's to dispose of. Even the right of 'to be or not to be' is denied to my unfortunate self."

CHAPTER 26

SITA IN HER GRIEF *(Continued)*

THUS did lady Janaki lament most piteously, her eyes turned to her mother Earth, whom she watered with her hot tears; and she of an age to enjoy everything in the shape of comfort and luxury. Then there came across her mind, the memory of what she had been and what she was. The thought drove her almost to madness. Like unto a man whose senses reeled under the influence of a strong drink, or one who was under a shapeless delusion, or a mare who having been driven fast and furiously, now rolls upon the ground to seek relief. Even so, did she find relief in easing her heart surcharged with dark grief.

"Alas! This wicked wretch is capable of taking any form at will through his magic arts. He threw a spell over Rama and Lakshmana. He used horrible threats to cow me down and carried me away by force. In the twinkling of an eye he brought me away here from my far abode and I calling up each and everything that I passed by to save me from him. Guarded most carefully by these cruel devils, my heart ever intent upon my lord and my soul tottering under the cruel strokes of unspeakable grief, it is hard for me to keep my hold upon life. Why, that prince of heroes himself has given me up as lost; and I see no call for me to linger in this world of men, to lead this life of wretchedness and agony in the midst of these demons. Gold and silver, gems and garments, comforts and luxuries, what have I to do with them. And this my heart that so bravely stands the buffet of the never-ending waves of sorrow, is it fashioned of flesh or granite, or has it been ordained that it should last to the stroke of eternity? I see that it shows no signs of weakening, of giving away. Am I justified in surviving the separation from my lord and husband even for the short space of an instant? The worlds above and below hold no one who could aspire to the heights of wickedness and sinfulness to which I have risen. There is not the slightest shadow of a doubt that the good and the great, the chaste and the faithful would spit upon me as a thing of scorn and horror. Behold, my lord is the supreme monarch of this sea-girt earth; his speech is ever soft and sweet and falls upon the hearts of men like the ambrosia of the gods; he is the life of my life. To live away from such a husband, to find delight in the arms of ease and luxury, what have I to do with it? So, I decide that these *rakshasis* may work their will upon this miserable body of mine. It is infinitely better to put away this tainted body than to live away from the presence of my lord Raghuvira. Would I even dream of spurning this sinful wretch, this Ravana, even with my right foot? And then to speak of my heart ever harbouring a traitorous thought of tenderness towards him? That cruel demon cares not to take into consideration, my misery and suffering; but throws himself at my feet and inflicts his base love upon me. Poor fool, knows he the untold contempt and horror that I feel towards him? The mean creature, what knows he of the noble race I come from and the greatness and glory of my real self? So, pitiless devils that you are, you but waste your time and energies in thrusting upon me your repugnant advice. It is utterly useless to seek to coerce me by your taunts and threats. Here do I face you without the slightest tremor of fear; chop me to mincemeat; throw your tomahawks at me; tear me to pieces with your fangs and talents; burn me to a cinder with your yell fires; but take it from me that I will not waste a glance at your Ravana.

"My lord Raghunatha is one that assiduously seeks for virtues, even in those that work him most cruel evil; he counts as infinite, the least benefit ever rendered to him, be it in thought, deed or word. His heart cannot bear the sight or memory of suffering. He has no other aim in life than to seek the highest good of others. These noble traits are not the result of a fond and partial love of a wife, but are admitted most reluctantly even by his worst foes. Why then should he put me away from his thought, and I tortured by these cruel fiends? It is plain therefore that I have put up no merit adequate enough to deserve such a consideration at his hands.

For, dare I harbour even a suspicion of his powerlessness to come to my aid? These eyes of mine were witness to that most wonderful scene, when in the short space of a *muhurta* he laid low in battle dire, the fourteen thousand *rakshasa*-heroes at Janasthana and the terrible Khara and Dushana to lead them. What is it to him, the might of this Ravana who keeps me in cruel bondage? It is a child's play for Raghuvira to cut away the life-threads of this sinful wretch. Did I not see how fared Viradha, the terrible giant that other day in the forests of Dandaka?

And this Lanka, like unto a gem set in the silver sea, is it beyond his reach? The countless worlds hold no spot that bar the course of the arrows of Rama. Why then does Raghunatha put up with this slur thrown upon his valour? The embattled hosts of his enemies dare not approach the consuming fire of his shafts; and a mean wretch of a *rakshasa* to lay violent hands upon the wife most dear to his heart! It is simply unthinkable.

Am I to infer that he knows not that I am here? Or his boundless mercy and tenderness of heart even unto his worst enemy, has it led him to forgive this Ravana? Why; even then if it were so, Lakshmana will never be a party to it. Behold the aged friend of king Dasaratha, who simply because Raghava left me in his keeping, fell upon Ravana as he was spiriting me away; and though tottering with age and weakness he put a dreadful fight with the mighty *rakshasa* and only succumbed to superior strength and skill. Alas! the only one who could ever give any news of myself to Rama is no more. So I conclude that my lord knows not of my whereabouts. For, he would not stay until his shafts winged with his fiery wrath, make this broad earth utterly innocent of the *rakshasa*-brood. He would scorch the waters of the broad and fathomless oceans and this Lanka will be reduced to its primeval state. Time will have to blot out from its pages, the name of Ravana and his *rakshasas*. And lo, these cruel *rakshasis* around me will wail and moan and weep and lament in every house, reft of their husbands, brothers and sons, even as I do now, away from those dear unto me. This shall come about and no doubt of it. No one has seen the bounds of their strength, power, might and skill; the Fates work with them to come upon this spot; and once they are here, these *rakshasas* have seen their last days. No foe, none has ever lived to tell the tale of having come within their ken and escaped. Vultures and eagles and other foul birds of prey will gorge themselves unto repletion over the countless corpses that will hide this Lanka from view. The funeral pyres that rise from this condemned isle will make the city dark and impassable; and then, this capital now so great, so glorious and so magnificent and happy will be one vast burning ground."

"Cruel devils that you are, see you not that your evil deeds come back to root and dog your footsteps? A short space of time and my hearts' wishes will be fulfilled to the utmost. This town will blaze with every variety of dangerous portents and will fall unto ruins, its splendour and glory but a name. This Lanka now unapproachable even in thought by foes, will, when this mean Ravana lies low, a headless corpse, shortly disappear from the face of the earth, even like unto a helpless girl whose husband has been torn away from her side by the cruel shafts of Death : and its place shall fade away from the memory of man. With no king to rule over it, with no auspicious rites to ensure its safety, its men all dead, this Lanka will be a home of wailing *rakshasis;* and it will be an eye-sore in its widow's weeds of darkness and mourning. These ears of mine will, at no distant time, be pierced by the shrieks and screams of the *rakshasi* girls in every homestead. The fiery shafts of Rama will fall here alround and drink the life-breaths of the greatest and most glorious of the *rakshasas;* this Lanka will be a blazing mass of ruins and then a huge pall of frightful darkness and gloom will hide it from view. The moment that Raghuvira knows that I am kept here in durance vile by Ravana, these and much more will turn out a hard solid bitter fact. Do you doubt it?"

"The day draws near which this cruel and mean wretch of a Ravana has to as the bounds of his patience; and but two short months are left of it. But you may say, 'It was only to strike terror into your heart and make you incline towards him that he said so; take it not too seriously'. Well, is there any crime, any sin, any atrocity, any outrage that he is not upto, this *rakshasa* to whom evil and sin are a second nature? So, it is beyond the shadow of a doubt that a terrible danger hangs over this city, judging by the wicked and unrighteous lives led by its people. These friends who delight in human flesh and blood, what know they of the fine distinctions between virtue and vice? Ravana but waits for the day he has fixed to give his orders for me to be prepared for his breakfast as a choice delicacy.

"Alas! what shall I do? Torn from the arms of my Rama whose graceful looks bring back to one, the memory of a red lotus in bloom and I gradually sinking beneath the waves of griefs unspeakable, how shall I get away from here? I will set my feet on the shortest road that leads to the halls of Death, if some kind soul hereabouts can get for me a dose of deadly poison, to me whom Fates have denied the pleasure and privilege of serving my lord and husband.

"I am sure that Rama and Lakshmana know not that I am alive; else, they would not have left one foot of this broad earth unsearched. So, it might be that they waste no thought upon me, as one dead and gone.

"Or, might it be that my Rama has fallen a prey to the grief and misery of being separated from me? Then the *devas,* the *gandharvas,* the *siddhas* and the sages will bless themselves with the sight of my lord in heaven, my Rama of eyes lovely as the red lotus. Ah! thrice fortunate are they.

"Or might it be that to him, a royal sage, a wife is of no import. For, he knows the mystery of things and has become one with the Absolute. The highest virtue and duty is the only goal. It is sinful even to indulge in such a thought, for, the perfect ones in this mortal world take not upon themselves, such bonds and responsibilities as these. But should they do so, they perform their duties most conscientiously. They never fall by the way.

"So, shall I take it that he has forgotten me? I am far far away from him and many a month has gone by, since he lost me. Out of sight out of mind; fie, fie upon me. What a wretch I am to harbour such a foul thought? Only ungrateful creatures behave thus. But Rama to whom it is a law of life to secure the happiness of those that seek refuge in him even at the risk of his life, dare I fasten upon him such a stain? So, it is but a waste of time and energy to seek to accuse him. When I come to think of the fact that Rama, who loved me so greatly and has stood between me and everything unpleasant, has now clean forgotten me, I decide that it is due to faults in myself. If so, I rack my memory for the slightest offence of faults towards him in word, deed or thought and come upon none.

So, it must be my sinful deeds in past lives that have come to harvest now. They have blotted out my good days and placed me in the power of these strokes of misfortune. Death is welcome to a life of misery away from the presence of that patron of duty, of that holy terror of his foes, of that soul of magnanimity. So, I cannot even assure myself that it is ill-luck.

"Or shall I guess that those noble souls have decided to put away their arms as they have been productive of so much misery and unhappiness to them and have elected to lead a life of penance and austerities and meditation as hermits of sages, with fruits and roots their only substance? It cannot be even that, for, a born *kshatriya* cannot reconcile himself to meekly slink away and not exterminate the *rakshasas* with whom he had sought a quarrel.

"Or has Ravana done away with them through his arts of illusion and hellish magic, even as he did the other day through the golden deer? Well, having lived to behold these miserable days, it is but a right retribution for me to seek death by every possible means. But I fear that even this sharp — toothed grief has no power to gnaw at the roots of my life. What! Am I so dreadful, so horrible that even death shuns me?

Now, reason and calm reflection are the only antidotes to this overmastering sorrow of mine. What avails it, the life of men who are under the spell of ignorance? Love and hate, the children of good and evil have no power over those great souls, who went through their duties in life without a thought of any return and endowed with the chastened intellect and reason resulting therefrom, retired into the deepest and undisturbed meditation (*samadhi*) and crossed to the other shores of love and hate, sin and sorrow. Everything unlikely, inauspicious and sinful dare not approach the consuming fire of their utter purity. Their hearts know no pang at being separated from the objects dear to them. Their hearts know no pang at being associated with what is not to their liking. My heart goes out in absolute reverence to those great ones, who have put away desire and hatred from themselves. They are the perfect men. Ah! Is it given to me to be like them any day? Raghuvira, my heart's delight, has pierced into the innermost mysteries of joy and sorrow and he, the life of my life, has elected to put me away; I am in the cruel grip of this sinful wretch of a Ravana and why should I soil myself with a death at his unclean hands, when there is a way open to me to seek it by other means?"

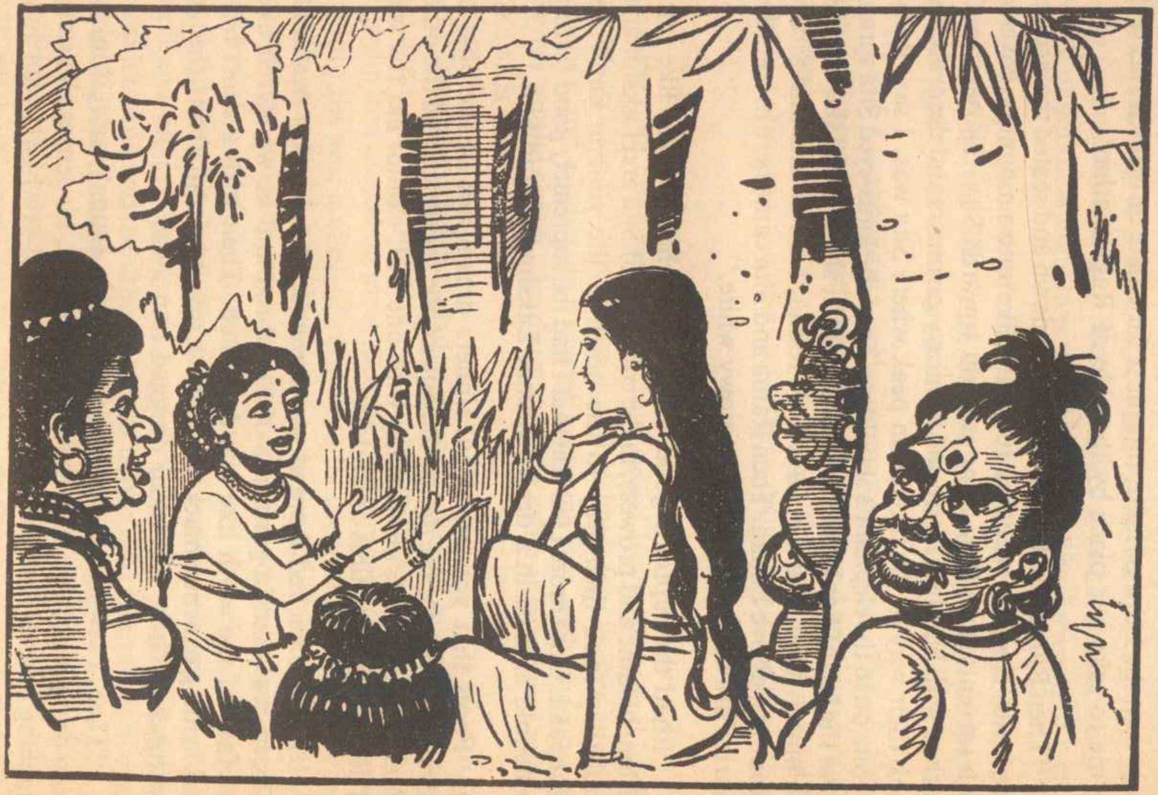
CHAPTER 27

TRIJATA HAS A DREAM

THESE spirited words of Sita roused the wrath of some *rakshasis* and they hastened to carry news of it to Ravana. Then, the others closed round Sita in horrible attitudes and made it plain to her with many a taunt and threat that evil, dire and imminent, hung over her. "Sita! Seek you to cheat our revenge by taking refuge in the arms of Death? We give you no time for it; but put you to cruel death this very instant and share alike on your worthless carcass." Now, Trijata was silently watching these wicked *rakshasis* at their cruel task. She was the daughter of Vibhishana. In years, intellect, experience and rectitude, she was far ahead of the *rakshasa*-brood in Lanka. She awoke all on a sudden from a deep sleep and turned to the *rakshasis* with a warning gesture. "Wicked wretches! Lay no finger on this daughter of Janaka and the daughter-in-law of king Dasaratha. If you cannot keep away your gnawing hunger, work your will upon your own worthless bodies. I come to you from a most wonderful dream and fearful. The very memory of it makes my hair stand on the end. It is ordained by the Fates that the lord of Sita will come by everything good and gracious; and destruction and danger hang over the heads of the *rakshasis*."

Her words changed the erstwhile anger of the *rakshasis* into abject fear; they gathered round her and cried, "Alas! A dream in the small hours of the night is sure to come about. So, narrate it to us in detail."

And to them replied Trijata, "Listen then, ye foolish creatures! Raghava and Lakshmana decked themselves in garments and garlands of snowy white. They came to this Lanka in a gold palanquin borne by countless swans. Then Sita clad in a single garment of



spotless white seated herself on a white mountain that graced the ocean of milk. Then like unto the splendour of the sun associating itself with the Lord of light, this most fortunate of women was seen by me to take her place by the side of Raghunatha."

"Then Rama and Lakshmana came down and seated themselves on a lordly elephant with four tusks and like unto a mountain covered with torrents; and they came straight towards Sita. Those princes clothed with blinding lustre and in snowy garments and decorations, took their way to the mountain peak where Sita was. I saw Rama lift Sita on to the elephant's shoulders. Then the lotus-eyed Sita sprang from the lap of her lover and soaring aloft, she grasped the sun and the moon. Then that elephant bore Rama, Lakshmana and Sita to a spot just above Lanka. Then Rama and Sita came here in a golden chariot drawn by eight bulls, snowy white."

"I had the supreme good fortune to behold Rama, like unto Vishnu in fame and prowess, in the company of Sita and Lakshmana. And they took their way to the north in the *vimana* known as Pushpaka. Once more I tell you that I had the supremely good fortune to behold at least in a dream Rama, Lakshmana and Sita."

"Fools that you are! Foul sinners dream not of the bliss of salvation. Even so, the *devas,* the *asuras,* the *rakshasas* and the other objects of creation, all working with one will, cannot bar the way of Rama of matchless splendour."

"But the wicked Ravana was covered all over with perfumed oils; he was clad in garments of blood-red and he wandered over the face of the earth like one demented. Then with a short head and with garments black as night I saw him fall from the car Pushpaka. Then, a woman dragged him away."

"Then, I saw him decked in red garlands, sandal paste, drinking deep draughts of oil. He behaved like an idiot, his senses all astray; laughing hoarsely and dancing like a maniac, I saw him driven away in furious haste towards the south in a car drawn by asses."

"Then he fell from the back of an ass; this Ravana fell headlong trembling all over with fear. Then he sprang up wildly and with senses and mind utterly confused by terror, he raved most foully like a mad man or a drunkard. Then he vanished from view all at once maimed into a deep and foul mire. It stinked most horribly. A pall of darkness hung over it and it looked like the worst of hells."

"Then, a woman of coal black hue, dirty and uncouth, came there clad in red. She flung her arms round the neck of Ravana and dragged him away towards the south."

"I saw Kumbhakarna in the same predicament. The countless sons of Ravana smeared themselves with oil and stood around in hopeless attitudes. Ravana was on a pig, Indrajit on a crocodile, Kumbhakarna on a camel; and these drove south as if pursued by fiends."

"Then Vibhishana was observed by me and his four ministers standing on a huge elephant of four tusks. It was large and lordly and roared like the storm clouds. Vibhishana was decked in white garlands and clothes and sandal paste; he was welcomed by the players on the conch, the drum and the other instruments and by the bards and dancers."

"Then, the *rakshasas* clad in garments, red of hue and garlands and deep under the influence of strong drink, gathered themselves in group and played on most dreadful instruments. Then this Lanka fell into the sea, a mass of ruins with its countless armies, towers, turrets, gates and I, a silent witness, to all this havoc and destruction. I saw a huge monkey, the messenger of Rama set on fire this capital of Ravana so carefully guarded by him. I saw the helpless *rakshasis* roam the erstwhile Lanka in garments of grey ashes, drinking deep of oil and singing and dancing and shouting like maddened devils. Kumbhakarna and the other *rakshasa* nobles clad themselves in deep red and dived headlong into large pools of dung."

"Raghuvira comes here at no distant time to rescue Sita. His wrath shall consume you and Ravana and the other *rakshasas;* seek refuge in flight; hide yourselves in safe retreats. This Sita lies next to the heart of Rama and he holds her in high esteem and consideration. She would listen not unto his warnings and almost against his will followed him to the forests; and do you think that he will stand by and see you torture most cruelly such a one? So, put away your cruel words and hellish torture. Placate her and seek to calm her wrath. It seems to me the best course for you and for all of us to humbly throw ourselves at her feet and pray her to stand between us and the wrath of Rama. This Sita, now a prey to every variety of grief and sorrow and misfortune will, at no distant time, shake them off from her and rejoice in the company of her noble husband. See you not that this is easily inferred from the dream I had? I know that you have almost killed her with threats and cruelties; but I tell you; pray unto her 'Save us from death and danger.' Doubt not that she will turn herself away from you from whom she had undergone so much misery and agony. When I recall the memory of what Rama has in store for the *rakshasas,* I think it is our first and foremost duty to seek to escape from that merciless Fate. I tell you, you know not in the least, the golden heart of her, whom you taunt and threaten. It is enough, nay, more than enough, if you take refuge in her mercy. She clean forgets the thousand and one wiles he has done unto her and returns them with the highest good a thousandfold and over. So, she and no other holds our Fates in the hollow of her hand and she and she alone can save us from our horrible fate though well-merited."

"Further, I can see no signs of any untoward change in her limbs. It may be that her lustre is a little dimmed. She is entirely unfit to come across grief or sorrow of any sort; she is meant to enjoy to the utmost the delights of the world of gods; and to this princess has come the burden of sorrow. I see full well the fulfilment of her hopes; I see full well that victory awaits the arms of Raghunatha; and I see most clearly that Ravana's days are numbered. I see also many signs that she will, in a very short space of time, have news of a very pleasant aspect. Her left eye broad and lustrous like the petals of the full-blown lotus, shines the brighter. Her left arm and her left thigh shapely as the tapering trunk of the elephant, tremble slightly and the hair stands on an end. Verily, verily these signs so auspicious, forerun the happy meeting between the loving pair. Behold, yon bird that perches itself on the branch of the tree. Its broad wings expanded to the full, it circles from left to right most auspiciously. It roars aloft and glides down most gracefully and seats itself on the bow, rich with fruits, shoots and flowers. This is the most favourable omen. Again, that bird feeds upon the sweet fruits of the tree; it rocks itself most joyfully in the gentle zephyr from the south; and gradually loses itself away in a dream of joy. It cooes most melodiously ever and anon and seems to say "Sita! why do you allow yourself to be overwhelmed with this grief? Your lord and husband will be here very soon; he will wipe away your hot tears and take you back to Ayodhya. Should you think for a while that your misery is unbearable, it is nothing before what tortures the heart of your husband. So prepare yourself by a nice bath and graceful garments, to go, meet your lover. It ill becomes you, this wan face bedimmed with blinding tears. Arise, I too cannot contain my joy at the thought of the glad news of the approach of your loving husband; my hair stands on an end." Thus it seems to lessen the poignancy of her grief.

CHAPTER 28

SITA DECIDES TO QUIT THE BODY

THE cruel taunts of Ravana pierced the tender heart of Sita; and she trembled with fear like unto a hind in the merciless grip of the lordly lion. Timid by nature to an abnormal degree, hemmed in on all sides by frightful demons and apprehending the worst from the words of Ravana, she looked like a young innocent girl, abandoned in the dark woods by her people and all through the stress of terrible famine. Her grief found a vent in sobs and lamentations.

"Alas! Is it that I had laid up not even an atom of merit in my past births? Threatened, tortured in every way by these fiends, yet, my life currents course on. Death draws near no man whose karmic account has not been finally adjusted in this birth; so say the wise and it is true. Ha! Woe is me, without the slightest gleam of happiness to break this dark monotony of sorrow at the mercy of an eternity of gloom and misery. Yet, my heart is not shivered to atoms like lofty mountain peaks at the touch of Indra's bolt. So I am not wrong in concluding that I have come upon the secret of eternal life. What prevents me from quitting my hold upon life rather than take alms eating out my heart with suffering; but such a course is considered most heinous. Well well, some day or other, I meet my fate in the hands of Ravana; and I see no crime, no sin, in taking my life into my hands rather than place it in his."

"The holy scriptures say, 'Save your life at any cost.' Then why not I do so by yielding to my captor? Alas! The *brahmana* is powerless to initiate the other castes in the mysteries of the vedic mantras. Even so, my heart cannot now or ever incline towards Ravana."

"If within the short space of two months Rama comes not here, Ravana will chop me to pieces most relentlessly even as the surgeon cuts to pieces, the limbs of a still-born babe in the womb. A thief having come under the clutches of offence to the king, immured in a dark dungeon, heavily chained and condemned to death when the first rays of the morning would kiss the sleeping earth, will die a thousand times over, ever thinking of his fate. Even so, my body quakes with intense terror as I think again and again that the two months of respite are slowly but surely drawing to an end. Like a stately ship gradually drawn beneath the waves by a huge whirlwind, I the most sinful of my kind, draw near my extinction."

"Ha Rama! Your name loudly proclaims endless bliss and all delights to him who beholds your countenance; but is it beyond your limits to put away grief from me and bring peace and joy to my heart?"

"Lakshmana! Do you remember the last words of your mother to you on the eve of your self-imposed exile to the forests? 'Look upon Sita as my own self'. You cannot afford to forget it even if Rama should choose to do so. Am I not a mother to you; and you care not to know what has become of me? Ah, my mother Sumitra to whom the innermost secrets of the lord are an open book! Behold your son forget your well-meant counsel and abandon me, his mother to hopeless sorrow and misery. It ill becomes you to look upon it with callous eyes."

"Mother Kausalya! You sent me to the dark forests along with your son trusting in his deep love for me and valiant right arm to fend me from all evil. Know you not that you have betrayed your trust?

"I wreck not if all these do turn away their hearts from me. But mother earth, my own mother, she that bore me in her womb, you too to treat me with this cruel indifference! It is not the nature of things to be so."

Or, like two mighty lions consumed to nothing by a crushing thunderbolt, is it possible that the mighty princes were done to death by treachery by that Maricha in the guise of a deer? Else, they would have flown hither on the wings of thought to ward off danger and disgrace from me. Nay, nay, how could a wretch of a *rakshasa* be given power over the lives of Rama and Lakshmana? So, it is but the spirit of Time that came to me as a golden deer and made fool of this most luckless of mortals. Else, would I be stupid enough to send away Rama on a wild goose chase and Lakshmana to bring him back? Rama of face like unto the orbed moon and mighty arms long and shapely, Rama ever dear unto the hearts of all beings; Rama to whom truth and justice is a law! Alas, you know not that I go to meet my death at the hands of the *rakshasas*. Am I the only luckless creature to whom it is denied to behold your dear face? Are your arms weak and powerless to ward off danger and death from me? Do you believe for a moment that you are justified in bearing the name of Rama when you cannot wipe away my tears and give me peace and happiness? Rama! The lord Narayana is the chosen deity of your worship; do I not pour my prayers unto him too? Again, do I in my wildest dreams ever know another god but yourself to protect me and fulfil my heart's wishes?"

"It is but light work for me to consume this *rakshasa*-brood in the worlds to dust and ashes by the fire of my wifely fidelity. But I have taken my refuge in you and have made myself over unto you to do as you will. Then I have shaken off ever shred of responsibility and care; and it is all upon your shoulders. Nay, should I ever lift a finger in my defence, it will be fatal to the principle of self-surrender. And what is worse, it will be fatal to the vow that you had taken. That and nothing else is the reason why I bear patiently these insults, tortures and agonies. What stayed me from leading a life of comfort, luxury, peace and happiness at Ayodhya? If I but care to waste a glance at Ravana, the countless worlds and everything they hold, are at my feet. My soul never hankered after them; it prayed and yearned to follow you through the world and share the dangers and difficulties of your exile here in the woods; and now, I am held here in durance vile, dust and dirt my royal couch. I can lay my hand upon my heart and say that it never strayed from the path of rectitude even for a movement. Alas! They go to waste, my good deeds, words and thoughts even as benefits showered upon ungrateful men. The words of our scriptures and the great ones that expound them — that the worlds of light are ever open to those who lay up merit by righteousness and service — are they but vain talk and deceitful? When you have abandoned me quite, no hopes have I of ever beholding you again; my hungry soul has wasted my feeble frame and turned it wan and woe-begone. You are my lord, you are my god; I have gone through the course of duty; but, they have proved barren, or have borne only bitter fruit."

"Perhaps you will keep your word, passed unto your father whose commands sent you to the dark woods; you have gone back to Ayodhya; danger and difficulty you have put behind you; the crown of the Ikshavakus sits upon your royal brow; and your life is a dream of delight in the company of royal dames of large and lustrous eyes. But alas, misfortune and ill-luck have marked me as their own; vows, fasts, penances, austerities, all have left me nothing in the shape of peace and happiness. The broad worlds cannot bound my love unto you; and it has brought me to my death; so, here I take the road that leads to the dark and gloomy halls of Death. Here do I put an end to this wretched life of mine. Poison or weapon, are they the easiest messengers of death; but I see around me no kindly soul to place them in my hands. And I can lay my finger upon each and every means of befouling myself and send it to perdition. This nest of sinners is an utter stranger to the means of guiding my steps along the path of right."

Thus and many a wise did Janaki wail, lament and bemoan herself, her face dry and woeful under the insufferable taunts and insults of the *rakshasis*.

Then she bethought herself that it was incumbent upon her to seek refuge in the arms of Death before her cruel captors awoke. So, her heart, her soul, her thoughts centred upon Rama, she drew near to the foot of the *simsupa* tree, in the leafy shelter of it where Maruti lay hid. She took counsel with herself as to the method of doing away with herself. "I will twine this braid of mine round yon low branch; and it shall be the rope to hang me. I will shake off misery and sorrow away from me and in a trice enter the mansions of Death." And the lady Sita, delicate of limb like the soft-petalled flowers, stood grasping the welcome bow that was to bear her soul aloft to its home on high.

But, a thought stayed her mind. "None knows better than myself the might and power of Rama. Is it just on my part to lose faith in him and take my life into my hands? May be he has put up all patiently with the thousand and one affronts of his enemy through his boundless love and compassion. But Lakshmana does not share with him this trial, he who was all on fire to deal destruction to Dasaratha, his father and Bharata, his brother. So, I shall not rush foolishly into the arms of Death without due thought. And then, the race of which I came, of the Janakas, how pure, how spotless; and I the wretch to blot it fully for all time?"

And as she was debating with herself thus, she beheld many a sign, many an omen good and auspicious. They were known to bring peace and prosperity to the hearts of men and put away sorrow from them. And they seemed to tell her "What have you to do with grief and misery thereafter? Take heart. All is well with you."

CHAPTER 29

AUSPICIOUS SIGNS

MANY an auspicious omen, blessed the lady Sita who was a prey to untold misery and down-hearted and bereft of every vestige of happiness.

Said she to herself, the incarnation of everything good and beneficent and faultless of character, "I was almost decided that there was never a time in my past, a single ray of joy relieved the dreadful darkness of gloom. I have seen that if a person was suddenly blessed with the grace of lady Fortune and was the source of wealth and power, poor men seek to be of service to him as best as they could and serve at the same time their own ends." Even so, all good omens, vied with one another to serve her to their best and attain to the highest positions they so eagerly desired. Lightly hidden under the thin veil of long and curved eye lashes, red at the end, tinged with white all round and black at the centre, her broad and lustrous left eye, quivered like a lotus shaken by the fins of fishes. Her left arm, perfectly moulded, large and of graceful curves, adorned with rare pastes of aloes, sandal and other perfumes, fondled by her beloved, throbbed often all along. Her left thigh like unto the trunk of the wild elephant, large, handsome, close, throbbed now and then and prophesied the approach of Raghunatha at no distant time. Clear of eye, of teeth dazzling white, slightly tinged at the ends like the grain of pomegranate, her upper garment curiously worked with gold and slightly dust covered, slipped down from her shoulders.

The omens of good import and many others recognised by the wise, made her think that her lord was coming to her. Like a seed, buffeted by the winds and parched by the sun, long hidden under the earth, but sprouting up at the cool touch of the welcome rains, the lady Sita, gradually became her old self with joy.

Like unto the moon just released from the cruel grasp of Rahu, her face recovered its old beauty and lustre, in all the glory of its lips of lovely red, graceful eyes, handsome brows, her long and wavy tresses of jet black, her curved eyelashes and pearl-white rows of teeth, so perfectly fashioned. Grief, dimness of intellect and consuming sorrow fell away from her; her face bloomed like a lotus, under the touch of joy; and grew in radiance, even like the Lady of night, in the fullness of her orb.

CHAPTER 30

HANUMAN DECIDES TO ADDRESS SITA

THE valiant Anjaneya was a patient listener to the talk of Sita with the *rakshasis* and the dream that Trijata unfolded later on. He directed a careful look at the lady, as she sat there like a heavenly nymph in the Nandana grove of Indra.

Many a thought flashed across his brain; and he said to himself, "It was given to me and to no other to bless myself with a sight of the lady Sita whom myriads of monkeys are seeking for, all over the earth. Like unto a secret spy, I have most skilfully acquainted myself with this city, the greatness and power of Ravana, and the peculiar characteristics of the *rakshasas,* all unseen by them. The beloved lady of Rama is consumed with a desire to meet him, the hero of boundless might and the lord of compassion to all the creation. It is absolutely necessary that I should bring comfort to her heart. An entire stranger to sorrow, now she is in its cruel grasp and sees no end to it, no relief. And this lady of beauty as the full moon, should I console, at all costs. If I go back without assuaging the heart of this lady, buffetted by the waves of the grief, I will be guilty of the most heinous crimes. This princess of worldwide renown is entirely unaware of the fact that there are friends and protectors near her; and she will quit her hold upon life before I go back to my friends; and my lord Rama, warrior of warriors, whose face delights the heart of every one like the full orbed moon, yearns to see the lady Sita; it is most urgent that I should take back to him, news of his wife and console him as best as I can. But these *rakshasis* are wide awake; and it is impossible for me to have speech with my Lady. Now, how shall I work it out? My objects do not pull on together. There yet remains somewhat of this night; and before it wears away, I must have consoled her; else there is not the least doubt that she will do away with herself anyhow. Should I go back without having speech with her, I would be forced to stand mute before my lord Rama, if he were to ask me. "What news do you carry to me from my beloved Sita?" Were I to go back in all haste, without carrying with me any message from this lady, the wrath of Rama will blaze forth and consume me to ashes. I must speak to her; I must convey to her the message that her lord entrusted to me; I must bring her relief as best as I may. Else, what good would it be, if I return and bring with me his majesty Sugriva, to do battle with Ravana. For, Sita would be but a thing of the past, long before he and his armies reach these shores. So, I will, from my hiding place here, watch for an opportunity when the *rakshasis* are asleep, or away, to have speech with my Lady and gradually dispel the grief and gloom that weigh her heart.

Now, how shall I speak? I am a monkey. Shall I take a very small form and speak in the language of men; or, shall I use the language of the gods, the perfectly formed *samskrita?* But if I speak in *samskrita* like a *brahmana,* Sita will be filled with fear and say, "How could a monkey, have a chance of speaking to others in *samskrita?* And so Ravana and no other has come to me in this guise and put some fresh deceit on me."

It is good that I use, the speech of men, pregnant with high import. I see no other way of consoling her. I must adapt the talk of the people of Kosala. Let it be. What form shall I take? If I stand before her as I am like a monkey, she will note my form and the human speech entirely unconsonant to it. She has, till now, been threatened and deceived by the *rakshasas* many a wise. She will be frightened the more and scream out under the belief that I am no other than Ravana, who takes any form at will. Her screams will wake the *rakshasas* and they will fall upon me with many a weapon and try their best to capture or kill me. When they behold me, grasping at the branches and trunks of trees and leaping to and fro, their hearts will quake with terror at the sight of the huge shape I would take to fight with them and cry half in doubt, "A puny monkey, a ranger of the forests, how could he be endowed with this vast bulk? He must be some emissary of one of our foes, capable of taking any form at will."

Then they will bring the palace-guards of Ravana, who will fight with me most valiantly with swords, tridents and other cruel weapons. Hemmed by them, I would have my work cut out, very fine to deal death unto them. I may be too tired thereafter to leap back across the broad sea. It may be that these *rakshasas* may fall upon me in countless numbers and take me alive. Then, my Lady has no chance of getting any news of Rama. These *rakshasas* ever delighting in the agonies of others, will ask her, "Who is he? Speak true"; and try to torture the truth out of her.

Then, the plans of Rama and Sugriva will be shattered to the winds.

Now, Lanka that holds her in strict confinement is sea-girt; and no one knows the way to it. Countless *rakshasas* watch it more carefully, night and day. Should they take me alive or slay me, I see no other monkey who would after a careful enquiry, take a leap over this wide waste of water, one hundred *yojanas* in extent and be of any use in accomplishing the purpose of Rama. But, no shadow of a doubt crosses my heart, whether I will slay in battle these *rakshasas,* though they come in countless numbers. I am not sure about leaping back over the sea thereafter. Defeat and victory in fight is not guaranteed to any one. So I will not entangle myself in a doubtful undertaking. No one with an iota of sense and intelligence will do so. Now this is the position. If I have no speech with Sita, she dies. But if I speak to her in this shape, there follows the dangers that I mentioned above.

Affairs of moment at the point of fruition, fail in their end if entrusted to a messenger with no powers of discretion or discrimination, like unto the cloud of darkness, dispelled by the rising sun; for, they are not suited to time and place. Affairs of State, even after they have been thoroughly discussed by the king with his counsels, come to a sad end when placed in the hands of messengers without discrimination; for, they spoil them beyond hope, taking themselves as supremely wise and intelligent.

Now, the purpose of Rama must be fulfilled; and I must not write myself large as a brainless idiot; and Sita must find comfort in my words and not be scared out of her wits. How to bring about these results without clash? I must speak to her about Rama, from my hiding place, and he the ideal man and dearest to her heart. Then, her thoughts would be centred upon him and keep away fear from her. I should describe in sweet words and pleasant, the countless perfection of Sri Rama, the crest-jewel of the line of Ikshvakus and the wisest of men. The lady Sita would repose confidence in me, only after she had listened to that speech, so auspicious and so consonant to virtue." Thus did Maruti of matchless skill, deliberate many a wise, about the spouse of Rama, the lord of creation. And from his hiding place on high, did he begin to discourse sweetly, the following words of high import.

CHAPTER 31

MARUTI NARRATES RAMA'S STORY

ANJANEYA thus decided within himself his future course of action and spoke to Sita from a short distance, in clear accents and sweet.

"The royal race of Ikshvaku was made glorious by a king of the name of Dasaratha. His army knew no bounds. He was by nature, inclined to the path of right. His fame spread to the utmost corners of the earth. His feet were ever on the path of rectitude. His name was ever upon the lips of all men, good and great. He was, even among the royal sages, distinguished for his noble excellences, while, in ascetic virtues he took his place with the sages (*rishis*). Born of a line of world conquerors, he rivalled the Lord of heaven, in valour and prowess. His heart ever took delight in harmlessness to all beings. Noble of disposition, merciful of heart, his might was ever purposeful and he rightly took his rank among the most famous of the kings of the line of Ikshvaku. The goddess of kingly power was wedded to him; and he imparted his glory and splendour to his kingdom. He was adorned with every royal excellence of quality and was known among his compeers as a mighty conqueror. There was no spot over this broad earth, that knew not his fame and renown. He was a bright ornament to royalty itself; and those that sought him were known to want no more. Wealth, power, glory, luxury and happiness of every kind fell to his lot in this life.

The eldest of his sons is known to the world as Rama. Ever dear to the heart of his father, irradiating peace and happiness from his looks on all around, there was no kingly science or art that he knew not. Most redoubtable of bowmen, yet, he discharged to perfection the duties of his order. He spread his shield over those that came to him for refuge and saw that his people ever followed the path of right and duty. The fire of his might was alone enough to consume his foes, for, he was the crest-jewel of the world of warriors.

The soul of truth, he took upon himself to carry out the promise that his aged father had made; and with his wife and brother came to the dark forests to lead the life of a hermit. And when out hunting there, he slew many a *rakshasa* who could take any form at will.

Khara and Dushana and the *rakshasas* that dwelt in the Janasthana fell by his hands. Ravana, the lord of Lanka, was enraged at it. He deceived Rama and Lakshmana by a ruse of a golden deer and when they were away from their cottage, he abducted the lady Sita, the dear wife of Sri Rama.

Then, Rama followed in search of her and chanced to make the acquaintance of Sugriva, the monkey-lord. Raghunatha, mighty beyond count and the terror of his foes, slew Vali, the brother and enemy of Sugriva and installed his friend in the kingdom.

Sugriva to show his gratitude ordered his warriors, who too could take any form at will, to range the world and bring news of the whereabouts of the lady Sita to him.

Sampati, the vulture told us that she is here; I desired to bless my eyes with a sight of the noble wife of Rama and flew over this sea of a hundred *yojanas* in no time. I searched this place through and through and was rewarded for my pains by coming here at last. And, she is even as my lord Rama described to me, the same in form, features, complexion and radiance." And he paused for a reply.

Words fail to paint the supreme wonder that filled the heart of Janaki as these strange words fell upon her ears. As becomes a woman endowed with every perfection, her hair was long, black, wavy and a little curved at the end. And she looked up with her braid of hair drawn tight round her neck, as she was in the act of doing away with herself. "Who might it be that poured into her ears the sweet balm? How might he look?" With fear and trembling, she cast her eyes on the *simsupa* tree. The words of the monkey were still ringing in her ears, as she carefully scanned all round; and her soul was filled with peace and joy; for, in it was enthroned for ever, her lord and husband. Then, she glanced at her side and found the *rakshasis* sunk in heavy sleep. No one was in view.

"Is it likely that some of the gods of heaven took pity upon my distress and brought me this welcome news?" She looked up and found no one.

"Or, might it be, that any one in the world below felt for my unhappy self and did me this supreme kindness? Or, is it my mother and goddess of the earth that consoles me thus?" And she looked down and saw none.

Then, she again cast piercing looks among the branches of the trees above her head. And her eyes lighted upon a form, most radiant to view. The voice was that of a monkey.

"To cross this wide waste of waters, to enter this capital of Ravana, the holy terror of the worlds above and below, to search this city through and through, unknown and unseen by its cunning people, to pass through the guards of the *rakshasas* and have speech with me in the very midst of these cruel *rakshasis*. Verily, it is no light task and no ordinary intellect that could conceive and carry out such a plan. His speech is soft and humble and shows that he is the servant of his lord. But his powers of speech tell me that he is a counsellor that could give excellent advice to his master. He has saved me from a miserable death at my own hands; and his sweet and auspicious words have been the means thereof. Verily I know that my lord Rama will keep his hold on life only if he has news of my being alive; and the entire creation lives in Rama. So, this messenger has, through his act, conferred the boon of life upon all beings. And, one might well guess that he has a right to be the son of the lord Vayu upon whom depends the life-breath of all creatures. And, he seems to be a messenger sent by a king of monkeys on some affair of State."

Her heart was filled with joy unspeakable as she thought to herself "Like the lovely god Aruna that heralds the approach of the welcome Lord of the day, this might be a messenger sent to announce the coming of my dear old Rama."

CHAPTER 32

MARUTI'S DOUBT

A further look at the object hid among the branches of the *simsupa* tree convinced her that it was clad in white and tawny of limbs, even as hundred of chained lightnings, with eyes of the colour of molten gold, even as bunches of blown *asoka* flowers. At first, she but glanced at him carelessly; but a more careful scrutiny filled her heart with fear and trembling, lest the object that brought her, words of comfort and hope, might be an illusion. And her wonder grew apace. "Is it possible that monkeys could ever have this terrible form and this blinding splendour? Never; verily this is but a hallucination"; and her heart was clouded with doubt. Her senses were adrift with fear and weighed with sorrow. "Rama, Rama, Lakshmana! Are you justified in standing by and seeing me at the mercy of these terrors?" Thus and many a wise did lady Sita bewail her cruel fate, as to melt the hardest of hearts.

But she sobbed as if her heart would break, for, fear came upon her. "If the Fates are ever so kind to me as to grant that this is a messenger in truth from my lord, these *rakshasis* might awake at the sound of my cries and find us out."

Once more did she cast a piercing look at the monkey that stood before her in low reverence and doubted if it might be a dream. Next her thoughts took a different hue. "Why is it impossible that this might be some one who has come to bring me comfort and hope?" And again she looked more keenly at his face, large and slightly sloping. But, the more she looked at the son of Vayu, matchless of intellect, who never failed in carrying out the behests of his lord Sugriva whose chief minister he was, the more did Sita fall a prey to fear and doubt. And, she fainted away and lay as one dead. But she came out of it after a while and said to herself.

"Alas! I have beheld this monkey in my dream and it is hideous to see. The science of portents tell us that it bodes ruin to our kith and kin if we behold a monkey in dreams. May the Great Powers grant that it is all well with my father Janaka and with Rama and Lakshmana. May all good go with them. Nay, this is no dream, for, dream comes to one whose eyes are closed in sleep. And sleep comes to one whose heart is light and happy and free from care. What have I to do with happiness and peace, who is in the cruel grasp of grief and sorrow? Peace to me, torn from the arms of Rama whose face puts the moon in her full to shame? Well, it is thus. My heart is ever filled with the thoughts of my beloved. My lips ever frame his name. And hence, it is quite natural that I should hear those words. It is quite in the order of things that my eyes behold shapes related thereto. All my thoughts are centred in Raghunatha. My love for him consumes me quite. Waking or dreaming, he is my only thought. Hence they are ever present to my senses and seem all real. So I take it that this is not true, this is but a creation of my own brain.

"Yet, on further thoughts this could not be so; for, such outcomes of fancy take no material shapes. Now this form of this monkey is quite material, is plainly visible to my eyes; his words sound naturally and clearly in my ears.

"Be it what it may; his words fill my heart with unspeakable joy. So, may the great gods Brahma, Indra, Agni and Brihaspati grant it might be real and not false."

CHAPTER 33

SITA'S REPLY

MARUTI of bright radiance came down from the tree and drew near the lady Sita with utmost reverence. His face of the complexion of coral, he joined his palms above his head and laid himself on the ground at her feet. Her sorrow echoed itself in his heart a millionfold. So, he addressed her in accents soft and sweet :

"Oh thou, of eyes lovely as the petals of the blown lotus! Oh thou, of matchless perfection every way! Who might thou be? Thou present to me a situation all incongruous as thou stand with thine arm on the bow of the tree and clad in ragged garments of silk. What causes the flood of tears from thy eye as they chase one another over the cheeks, like water drops scattered from the lotus leaf. Thy eyes are fitter to be adorned with tears of joy. Then whose race is doomed to destruction that they are dimmed with tears of grief? Who art thou, of the rangers of the heavens, gods, *asuras, gandharvas, rakshasas, yakshas and kinnaras?* Thy looks proclaim thee as one of the heavenly nymphs. Who art thou, of the clan of Rudras, Maruts, Vasus and the other Shining Ones? Do I see before me the lady Rohini, the best and noblest of the asterisms and endowed with every perfection, come down to the mortal world from the side of her lord, the Moon. Oh thou, the source and abode of everything auspicious and holy! Who are thou?

"Might it be that the sacred Arundhathi herself has come down among us from her abode on high, having offended her lord, the *maharshi* Vasishtha, through anger or ignorance? Dost thou grieve for thy dear departed sons, brothers or husband?

"I decide that thou cannot be a heavenly nymph, in that thy tears flow ceaselessly, in that thou heavest hot sighs and in that thy feet rest on the earth. Royal excellences vie with one another to find a place in thee. Thy perfect limbs and the lines that grace thy palms and soles bespeak thee as nothing less than a queen or princess.

"Or if it so happens that thou art the very lady Sita spirited away from Janasthana by the unholy Ravana; then, may all good go with you and everything auspicious. My heart yearns to know the truth about thee. Pray deign to enlighten my ignorance. It is rare, almost impossible for one to come upon such perfection of beauty and such unspeakable grief. Thou art clad in the guise of the hermits of the forest. So I decide beyond a doubt that thou must be the dear wife of my lord Rama."

Janaki heard him out patiently; her heart overflowed with joy at the news of Rama and she spoke back to Anjaneya who stood at the foot of the tree. "There moved among men a king by name Dasaratha, the best and noblest of kings and heroes; and with all, deeply versed in the mysteries of the wisdom of the self; and I am proud to call myself his daughter-in-law. The great one, Janaka the ruler of the Videhas calls me his daughter. And I am the beloved wife of my lord Rama, of mighty intellect. They call me Sita. I abode with Raghava for twice six years enjoying to the full, everything that this earth could give to a person in the way of comforts and luxuries. My life was one long dream of happiness and there is nothing that I yearn for. In the thirteenth year of my abode at Ayodhya, the king and *maharshi* Vasishta took counsel together and it was decided that Raghunatha should be crowned as heir-apparent. Mighty preparations thereto were on foot, when the lady Kaikeyi, the favourite wife of Dasaratha said to him, "If it so chances that the crown rests on the brow of Rama, take it from me that my lips are a stranger to meat and drink. I go to seek comfort in the arms of Death. Recall to your memory the boons that you, of your own accord, conferred on me through gratitude and love. Prove true to your word and send Rama away from the kingdom to the dark forests."

Now, Dasaratha was the soul of truth. The words of Kaikeyi were most bitter to him. Yet, he bethought himself of his word he had passed to her; and his heart was rent in twain. He was old, very old; he was the guardian of truth and duty. He cried aloud in dark despair and called unto him his first born, the lord Rama of spotless fame, "Rama! This kingdom of Ikshvakus is yours by hoary tradition, by your absolute fitness for it and by my sacred promise to yourself. Yet, I beg it of you now."

My lord was so fashioned by nature that his spirit and enthusiasm and happiness and splendour rose higher, the more he was assailed by what would bring misery and weakness to the ordinary men of the world. He decided unto himself that it was higher and more becoming to carry out the promise of his father than rule over this broad kingdom. "Sire!" he replied with joined palms of reverence, "to hear is to obey." For, it was the rule of life that he set before himself. He holds in trust everything he has but to give it to him who asks for it. He falters not. He would not take back even the wherewithal to maintain himself. He would not speak a word to ruffle the happiness of those that brought him into the world. For, he was no ordinary man but a mighty warrior whose anger or favour is never in vain.

So, he took off his royal robes and priceless ornaments, he mentally put away from himself the crown that was his by right and he laid his word upon me to abide with his mother the lady Kausalya. Verily, the countless worlds are too narrow to contain his fame. And is it not strange that I should even dream of leaving his side, be it to dwell in the highest heavens? So, I made my arrangements to dwell with him in the woods and went before him. His brother Lakshmana clad himself in a garment of bark, even as Rama whom he resolved to follow to the ends of the world. Thrice fortunate was he and the soul of delight to his friends, this son of the noble lady Sumitra, whose law of life was to devote himself entirely to the service of Ramachandra. He rejoiced, strangely enough, that there was a hitch in the coronation of Rama; for, it gave him the dearest wish of his heart. He had vowed unto himself to render loving service to his brother, at all times and under all conditions. When the lord Vishnu came down among men for their good and peace and happiness, Lakshmana monopolised the priceless privilege of service to him, that Bharata, myself and even yourself could never dream of. He was the darling son of the lady Sumitra whose last words to him were "Were you not born to follow Rama to the woods and be his server?" His friends rejoiced in the good fortune of their beloved Lakshmana though they themselves were denied it.

We left Ayodhya behind us by the orders of king Dasaratha, resolved to lead the life of hermits in the trackless woods. They were utterly strange to me, those dark and fearful forests of Dandaka. We abode there for many years; and one day Ravana, out of utter ignorance of the boundless might of Rama, was impelled out of his wicked heart to carry away myself, dearest to Rama's heart. Two months yet remain of the limit he has set to me to yield to his wishes. And I will not survive it."

CHAPTER 34

MARUTI'S ACCOUNTS OF RAMA

EVEN as the never-ceasing billows that chase one another, Sita spoke thus from the depths of a heart surcharged with grief. And Hanuman sought to bring peace and comfort to her and said, "My lord Rama fares well; and he sent me here to acquaint you with it. I came here to take back news of you to him. Raghuvira, to whom the Brahmastra and the *Vedas* are no mystery and their secrets, has laid his commands upon me to tell you of his welfare. (All other *astras* or magic weapons are implied here by the mention of the *astra* of Brahma who fashioned this universe. A knowledge of the *Vedas* implies the knowledge of the path of right; a knowledge of their import implies a mastery of the science of wisdom .......T.R.). His brother Lakshmana eats his heart out at the memory of the calamities that have befallen you; and he lays his head at your feet. I need not mention to you that this spiritual lustre is unparalleled, that he is ever dear to the heart of Rama and has the supreme merit of being chosen to render him every service." Sita was overjoyed at the news of the well-being of Rama and Lakshmana, the noblest of men; and her hair stood on end over her body. And she said to herself with a glance at Maruti, "Wonder of wonders! The wise say that a man has only to live on for five score years and is sure to come upon peace and happiness at least then." And that saying has proved true in my case. Had I given way to the fit of despair and hastened over-much to take my life into my hands, I could never have lived to hear his blessed news."

Then her heart was filled to overflowing with a wonderful trust and love to Hanuman who was sent to her by her lord and they talked to each other very confidentially.

At which Maruti thought he should console her better and make her forget her grief and came nearer. All at once the black doves spread their wings over her heart once more; and she saw the dread Ravana in him again. "Alas! In a moment of folly I have opened my heart to this person and kept nothing back. Verily, the worlds hold none who cannot stand with me on the pedestal of idiocy. It is Ravana and no other that laid violent hands upon me long ago, that has disguised himself thus." And she let go the branch of the tree and sank upon the earth through grief.

Now, Anjaneya found that he had overshot himself. The lady Sita was almost beside herself with fear and sorrow. He bowed in low reverence before her (for, he knew that she was the Mother of Mercy whose heart ever went out to those that took refuge in her. And this was the very best way he could take to clear this doubt .......T.R.). But Janaki could never bring herself through fear to even glance his way.

After a while she found that he was standing before her with his palms joined above his head. She heaved a deep sigh. "Oh! if you are indeed Ravana, the master of all illusory arts, it bodes you no good to torture me further, whose heart is almost broken with the cruel strokes of ill-fortune. Are you not the wicked one, who in the guise of a hermit, deceived me in the dark Dandaka forest? Able to take any form at will, this is but a trifle to you. I tell you again that it bodes you no good to torture me further, seeing that I am weak and wan from fasting and I am heavy of heart with sorrow."

"Alas! I think I am in the wrong in thus doubting you. For, my heart is filled with boundless trust and love at the sight of you. So, you cannot be the dread Ravana. Oh! if you are indeed the trusted messenger of my lord Rama to me, may all good be thine. Everything relating to my lord Raghunatha is ever sweet to me. So tell me this, out of your good heart. Speak unto me the boundless excellences of Sri Rama, my best beloved. Like the swift current that cuts into the banks on either side, you slowly yet surely twine yourself round my heart."

"Let this be. After such a length of time, it is almost impossible that a messenger should come from Rama crossing this wide waste of waters and find me out here, where even the viewless air cannot gain an entry. Hence this is a dream doubtless; yet, the sweetest of dreams. Ah! it was given to me, so long after my being spirited away from the side of Rama, to bless my eyes with the sight of a messenger from him and drink in the sweet accounts that tell me of his welfare. Wonderful, most wonderful! All my grief, would vanish like the mist before the sun and my heart will almost break with joy, if this sweet dream continues and enables me to have a sight of Rama and Lakshmana; but, alas! even dreams stand arrayed against me."

"And yet, I see no reason to conclude that this is a dream. The wise tell us that it bodes evil for one to see a monkey in our dreams. But in my case, it has brought me supreme good and gain. Can it be my disordered fancy? Can it be that the humours in my body have run riot? Is it the result of unhealthy bile? Or, is it but a child of imagination like a mirage? Or, has this delusion come upon me out of my consuming desire to hear that he is well and my constant meditation upon his perfections? Or, is it because the vital elements in my body have been thrown out of gear through long fast and sleeplessness? Or, is it the stage of madness that comes upon one who is torn away from the arms of her beloved? Or, is it a false conception that, like a mirage, causes one object to appear another? And yet, I see no reason to conclude that it is a fit of madness. A delusion is possible only if it has a corresponding object of reality to remove it. Further, people under the influence of delusion and madness know not themselves or what they do; they know not others and what they do. They see things away. The real and the unreal change places with them and guide their actions. But it is not so in my case. For, I see clearly the form of myself and of this monkey that stands before me. The four states of mind spoken of above, pass in course of time; but this does not pass away but remains. Again, ignorance is the root from which they spring; and I cannot accuse myself of it; but I am confident that my reason is as clear as ever."

Thus, she cogitated within herself giving due weight to the arguments for and against. At length, she came to a conclusion that the object before her was, of a truth, Ravana who could take any form at will. And this decided her to turn away from him and hold her peace.

He read her through and through like an open book; and brought peace and happiness to her heart by his sweet words. "There lives among men a great being. He resembles the Lord of day in splendour, the moon in bringing joy to those that behold him, to Kubera the God of wealth in standing high above the rulers of the earth, to Mahavishnu in his fame and prowess, to Brihaspati in his intellect and to the God of love in his matchless beauty. His speech is ever sweet and wedded to truth. His looks are ever bright and fascinating. He knows when to give way to wrath and consume his foes. There stands none by his side or above him. He is a great car-warrior. The universe rests safe and happy under the shade of his might.

Ravana caused him to leave his cottage, through the ruse of a golden deer; and in his absence carried you away. And very soon you will behold the fruits of his unholy labours. Very soon my lord Raghava will lay low in battle dire, this dread lord of Lanka, with his arrows blazing with the flames of his wrath. Trust me, I am his messenger to you. His heart heavy with misery at being away from you, he sent me here to take back news of your well-being. Lakshmana of matchless radiance and valour, the mighty son of the thrice-fortunate Sumitra, asked to convey to you his humble reverence and bring him news of your well-being. My lord Sugriva, the ruler of the monkey-kingdom and the dear friend of Raghava has ordered me to bring him news of your welfare. Rama, Lakshmana and Sugriva have no other thoughts but of you.

It is verily by the grace of the gods that you are yet alive and in the hands of these cruel *rakshasis*. Very soon, sooner than you think, will you see here Rama, Lakshmana and Sugriva of matchless might, shine in the midst of the myriads of the monkey-hosts. Believe me, I am one of the ministers of His Majesty Sugriva; they call me Hanuman. I took a leap over the sea and entered Lanka but in search of you. Through the grace of my lord Rama, I placed trust in my strength and might; and came here in search of you; and this Ravana is nothing to me. I am not he as you doubt it. Put away from you this false conceit and put all trust and confidence in my words."

CHAPTER 35

MARUTI'S ACCOUNTS OF RAMA *(Continued)*

SITA heard him out, the mighty monkey narrate the deeds of fame of Raghava and she rendered sweet reply to him. "Well, how did it come about, this connection between you and Raghunatha? How do you chance to know about Lakshmana? How in the nature of things could there spring up an acquaintance between man and monkey? Describe once more and in full, the distinguishing characteristics of Rama and Lakshmana — their limbs, their form, their arms, their thighs; and my heart will turn towards you in love and trust and my grief will find an end."

Whereat Hanuman set about to describe the characteristic features of Sri Rama as far as he knew. "Lady! Should you feel so, that I am the messenger of Rama and put away from you the black doubt that I am the wicked Ravana and command me to tell you what I know about the form and features of my lord Rama and Lakshmana, I will essay the difficult task as far as I know. I pray you lend a careful ear to it. Perfect beauty adorns the limbs of Rama; yet words fail me to paint the liveliness of his eyes like unto the petals of the blown red lotus. Even as deep eddies in the current of lustre, they charm away the hearts of all beings. Why, they fascinate me who am at best no better than a monkey swinging itself from tree to tree and utterly ignorant of right and wrong. Countless perfections seek a place in his body and mind. They are his birthright. Oh, I bethink that you know them best, who thus put me to the test? Even mighty sages that keep strict and stern mastery over the desires of the heart through austerities and meditation, even they set their eyes upon him and stand entranced with joy."

"Like unto the Lord of day and splendour, patient as the Mother earth, mighty of intellect even as Brihaspati, the guide and counsellor of gods, of bright fame even as the lord of the shining ones, he casts his shadow over all beings and in it they rest happy. Those that seek him are strangers to want and grief. He carries out to the utmost, the duties of his caste and order of life. His valour is ever laid at the root of those that seek to do him evil. The four orders of society are to him even as himself to watch and protect. He lays down the laws for the guidance of the world and sees that they are duly observed. Of matchless lustre he is the object of worship and reverence of all beings. (Rama is here identified with Brahman that is the source of evolution, continuance and involution of the universe. He instructs men and gods in the duties of their order through the *Vedas* and the *sastras*. He sees that they are observed as the spirit of time and spreads his shadow over the four ranks of society having come down on earth in mortal guise — *Tilaka).* He is a holy celebate to all intents and purposes (Manu the great law-giver has it that sixteen out of thirty nights in a month is the season for women. Of them the first four days after their courses, the full and the new moons are to be avoided and the even days are best for conjugal functions. He who observes strictly this rule of sexual life is a celebate though he be a house-holder). He knows the right time and the moment to do good to the just and the righteous. He knows the truth about the causes of the execution and the results of human endeavours. He is proficient in the royal sciences of *anvikshiki, trayi, vartta and dandaniti* (the four branches of polity). He pays devout reverence to the holy Brahmanas. He sits at the feet of the great and the wise and learns from them the true teachings of the *sastras*; doubt and misconception about it are strangers to his intellect; and his acts ever keep pace with what he has learnt. Humility is the bright jewel in the crown of his excellences. He is an adept in the mysteries of the *Yajurveda* attached to his clan. He is held in high esteem by those that know the inner truth of the *Vedas*. But he is one of the highest exponents of the other branches of the *Vedas* too and of the military science.

Broad-shouldered and deep-chested, his arms are stout, long and finely shaped. His neck is fashioned on the model of the curves of conch. His face is lovely and auspicious. The muscles of his chest and arms are large and strong even as iron bands. His eyes are of red tint even like the petals of the red lotus. His voice is like the rumbling of a mighty drum. His complexion is fair and dark. His body is well proportioned to his limbs; and he is the ideal warrior and hero. And it is known to all the worlds that he is the possessor of all these excellences and perfections. His chest, wrists, fist, these three are hard. His brows, arms and scrota are long; the hair's ends and the knees are symmetrical and even. His navel, stomach and chest are a little elevated. His palms, the corners of his eyes, his soles, these three are red. The lines on his feet, his hair and his sign of manhood are smooth. His voice, the strength of body and his navel are high. His neck and stomach are crossed with three auspicious lines. The breasts, the nipples and the lines on his feet, these three are a little inconspicuous. The veins do not show themselves on his feet. The hair roots have but one specimen of their kind. The organ of manhood is small. The lower portion of his stomach is devoid of any unnecessary flesh. His head is perfectly symmetrical, large and round like an umbrella. Four auspicious lines run along the foot of thumbs. His body is four cubits high or ninetysix inches. His shoulders, knees, thighs and cheeks are even. His brows, nostrils, ears, lips, nipples, elbows, wrists, posteriors, these fourteen are well-proportioned and even. His teeth are smooth, even and prominent; and have four that stand out like fangs. His gait takes after that of the elephant, the lion, the tiger and the bull. His lips are red and full like the guava fruit and the *vaha* flower. His cheeks are full and fleshy. His nose is a little high. His hair, his eyes, his teeth, his skin and soles are soft and glossy. The body, the back, hands, feet, fingers, eyes, ears, organ of manhood are long. The face, the mouth, the eyes, the tongue, the lips, the jaws, breasts, nails, hands and feet are of the hue of the red lotus. His chest, his head, his face, his neck, his arms, his shoulders, his navel, his right flank, his back and his voice, are broad and mighty. His lustre, fame and wealth, are ever in the lips of man. A tinge of white runs over his eyes and teeth. His arm-pits, stomach, breast, nose, shoulders and face are little elevated. His hair, moustache, nails, skin and the hair upon it, his thumbs, his organ of manhood, are fine and subtle even as his intellect. He knows best how to discharge the functions apportioned to the forenoon, mid-day and the afternoon. He knows best how to acquire wealth by lawful and just means, how to distribute it. He knows best the time, place and manner of doing things. His words fall sweet and soft and pleasant on the ears of all creatures. He is the abode of the goddess of wealth and prosperity. In short, every excellence, every perfection that go to grace the ideal man, find a place in him. (The *Samudrikasastra,* Varahamihira, Vararuchi, *Brahmapurana, Gargasamhita, Naradapurana,* Nandi and Katyayana, might very profitably be consulted to confirm the above statements with regard to the science of human perfections of body and mind).

Lakshmana, born to Sumitra and brought up by Kausalya, was invincible; the counterpart of Rama in compassion and love and beauty and excellences. The two came upon us during their search for you all over. Sugriva the ruler of the monkeys was driven from the kingdom by Vali, his elder brother. In terror of him, he lay hid in the rear of the thickly wooden mountain Risyamuka.

We are the adherents of Sugriva, of charming presence and true to his word. Rama and Lakshmana came to where we were seeking for him in the guise of hermits, but armed like warriors. Sugriva was sore afraid when he saw them and leapt away from the spot in utter confusion. Then he hid himself in another place and sent me to them to know their story. I saluted those great men, adorned with every excellence of body and mind, in the name and by the order of His Majesty, and acquainted myself with their history, while I placed before them humbly, our circumstances and objects. Then, they were pleased to extend their favour and confidence to me and to my master and rode on my shoulders to where the ruler of the monkeys was. I related to Sugriva the story of those great men as truly as I could. They exchanged confidences, spoke of their past, grew in affection and trust towards each other and consoled themselves in a way. Rama, sought to bring peace to the troubled heart of Sugriva who had been driven from his kingdom; and all through a woman.

Then Lakshmana informed Sugriva of how Ravana spirited you away and how Raghunatha, the blameless one was eating his heart slowly through, being torn from your arms.

Sugriva lost his beauty and radiance at the news, even like the sun in the full grip of Rahu. The mighty monkeys joyfully placed before Rama, the ornaments and clothes that you threw down, as

Ravana bore you away; but we were not able to get at the place where he hid you. It was I that found the articles before and took them to Sugriva. He preserved them carefully and gave them to Rama when he was beside himself with grief. Raghunatha bright as the gods themselves, lamented many a wise when the memory came on him of how they graced your limbs. They but added fuel to the fire of his life and made it blaze mildly, wan and pale as he was, crying his heart out when he saw them. Raghuvira of boundless fortitude, was overcome with grief and faintness held him long in its grip. Then I brought him out of it, consoling him in diverse ways. Rama and Lakshmana went through the collection one by one, described them minutely, grieved sore and handed them back to Sugriva.

Samvartaka, the Fire of destruction blazes high on Malyavan, one of the peaks of mount Meru. Even so, is Rama consumed by the fire of grief at being torn away from you. Old memories of you, came upon him; and in their train followed anxiety, grief and sleeplessness, making him their helpless victim. Even as the sacrificial fires of *garhapatya, dakshina* and *ahavaniya* burn fiercely in the fire chamber (*agnihotrasala*), sorrow crushes him under its heavy load, when he finds that he cannot bless himself with a sight of you and it shakes him wildly even as huge mountains when they are lashed by terrible earthquakes. He finds you not in lovely forests, cascades and rivers, though he scours them through and through and thus sharpens his affliction. The day draws near when he will lay low in battle dire, Ravana, his sons, his kin and his friends and bear you back.

Rama and Sugriva made a mutual promise to slay the mighty Vali and find you out. Then, they went to Kishkindha; and there Rama killed Vali, while he was fighting with his brother and placed the crown on the brows of Sugriva, as the lord of the monkey-kingdom. You were pleased to ask me "How could there be any relation between the monkeys, bereft of reason: and Rama and Lakshmana of the line of Ikshvaku and the spiritual disciples of the *maharshi* Vasishtha?" I have placed before you the incident in all its details. It has been given to me, a low monkey leaping from tree to tree, to have speech with you, the Mother of universe, born of the Videhas and married into the Raghus. Again, Raghunatha and Sugriva have been brought into intimate relations. Again, I myself, the soul of ignorance and brainlessness, have been deputed to carry out a mission, connected with the royal lady of Raghuvira, though there is Lakshmana who has sworn that he would perform every service to Rama and has been born as his brother for that very sake as it were. These might be some examples in evidence.

Sugriva was restored to his throne; he sent for his generals and caused them to make search for you in all directions and the monkey warriors, mountaineers in bulk, set out on their quest all over the earth, impelled by the word of Sugriva; and they are still at it. We are one of them. Angada, of boundless might and splendour, led a third of the monkey-hosts as becomes the son of Vali. We lost our way among the defiles of the Vindhyas and suffered much. Then we decided to quit our hold on our bodies. For, we had missed the day appointed by his majesty; we were sure afraid of the terrible fate he has in store for us; and we were barren in our quest for you in the forests and mountains.

When he saw that the monkey-heroes were determined to die of starvation, Angada was overcome with grief and lamented loudly recalling your abduction, the death of Jatayu and Vali and their own ultimate death through enforced fast. When we were thus beset with despair and were about to do away with ourselves through the fear of Sugriva's terrible punishment, Sampati chanced to come there. He was the elder brother of Jatayu and the monarch of vultures. Old beyond count, mighty beyond description was he. He came there as if to set the seal on our wishes. When he heard of what befell Jatayu, he was beside himself with wrath and cried, "Monkeys! Where did my dear brother take leave of this world? Who sent him out of it? Give me the details."

Then, Angada acquainted him with how Jatayu was killed in a terrible fight with Ravana as he carried you away from Janasthana. Thereat, Sampati, the son of Aruna grieved sore. It was he that told us of your stay in the harem of Ravana. We were mad with joy at the news and betook ourselves with Angada to the shores of the sea. But, our joy, our enthusiasm, our burning desire to see you, though it made us forget ourselves, were damped and cowed when we thought of how to cross the great ocean, trackless and boundless. Then, my heart softened towards them; I relieved them of their load of anxiety and lightly leapt over the hundred *yojanas* of waters. I entered this Lanka at night and went through it from end to end, though it was guarded by countless *rakshasas* most vigilantly. I came upon Ravana as he was sleeping among his women. And at last I blessed my eyes with a sight of your holy self, writhing in the grip of grief.

I have replied you in detail and in truth. Are you now at least, assured that I am not Ravana? I am the messenger of Rama. You can speak to me freely and confidently. I am the son of Vayu; I am the minister of Sugriva. I am sent by Rama and have come here to see you. Raghuvira, the best and bravest of warriors fares well; and also Lakshmana who regards Sri Rama as his father; and blessed with all noble perfections, is ever absorbed in devoted service to him. And I, ever, intent on the welfare of your husband, the great hero have come here by myself at the command of Sugriva. Eager to learn the place where you abode, I sought all through the south and have come here. By the way, I may tell you that I can take any form at will. I will carry the happy news of my meeting you here, through the grace of God, to my friends whose hearts are sore and heavy through the barrenness of their quest. It is not for nothing that I leapt over the seas. I have crowned myself with the fame of having discovered your whereabouts. Raghava, the prince of heroes will, in no time, rid the earth, of Ravana, his sons, his friends and his kin; and he will be with you.

Perhaps you may wonder how a monkey, as I am, can be born to the lord Vayu. Kesari, the mighty monkey, had his abode on the mountain Malyavan. One day, he was requested by the *rishis* that were practising *tapas* on the seashore, to rid them of Sambasadana, the *asura,* who afflicted them sorely. He made short work of him, the wretch, on the mount Gokarna. (Then it so chanced that his wife Anjana roamed about the mountain slopes in the guise of a mortal. She was an *apsaras* born through the curse of the gods, as the daughter to Punjara, the monkey; Punjikastala is her name among the gods. The Lord of air was fascinated by her charms and clasped her to his heart. Black wrath and fury surged in her heart, when she felt that a stain had been thrown at her wifely purity; and she started to curse him most dreadfully. "Nay, Nay, my love! Do not give way to senseless anger. I seek not to wreck you. I would even bring into the world, a boy, my equal in strength, valour, intellect, speed and fame. Your spotless chastity shall not suffer in the least. This will bring about the highest welfare of the countless worlds" said he and vanished from view). So I was born to the lord Vayu, through the wife of Kesari. I am known as Hanuman too, through an incident that took place at that time. (The babe took the rising sun for a luscious fruit and sprang aloft to catch it. Indra, apprehending danger to the Lord of Day, hit him with his *vajra* and broke his jaw; hence the name). I desired to inspire you with confidence in myself and described the perfection of my lord Raghava, to the best of my ability. He will be here very soon and lead you away from this hell."

Sita was wan with grief till then. But the above reasons and descriptions and tokens made her to place confidence in Maruti; and she decided that he was an emissary of Rama. Her joy was boundless and welled over from her eyes. Her face with its lovely eyes, shone afresh even like the moon, freed from the grip of Rahu. She concluded most clearly unto herself that he was the monkey Hanuman and none other. Then Anjaneya, turned to Sita whose face bloomed with joy and said : "Lady! I have placed before you everything that I know. Cast away grief and anxiety behind you. I am here to carry out your highest commands. I go back since I am most anxious to acquaint Raghava, as soon as I can, with the news of your safety and well-being. Let no thought cross your heart, 'What help can I hope for, at the hand of this puny creature?' I tell you, I am born to the wife of Kesari, the mighty monkey, when he was away to deal death to Sambasadana, the *rakshasa*. I deem myself the equal of my father, the Lord Vayu in strength, valour and speed."

CHAPTER 36

HANUMAN HANDS OVER THE SIGNET RING OF RAMA

MARUTI of boundless radiance, addressed himself, to Sita most humbly to inspire confidence in himself and handed over the signet ring of Rama with the words, "Lady fortunate beyond count! I am the messenger sent to you by Sri Rama, the wisest of the wise. Cast your eyes on this signet adorned with his glorious name. Sri Rama entrusted it to me that you may trust me and laid his orders upon me to hand it over to you. I pray you put away care and sorrow from you. All good go with you; your griefs will vanish never to return and that, soon than you think."

Sita took it from him, the jewel that adorned the finger of Rama and gazed along and lovingly at it; and joy boundless filled her heart as if she saw her beloved again. She could never take her eyes from it. At first she felt a touch of fear that it might be Ravana in this strange guise. Then there came to her mind many a reason that led her to decide that he was the dear messenger sent to her by her lord. It begot sweet trust in him; and she looked again at the signet of Rama. She felt as if she had met him in person; and lost herself in the sweet feeling that followed it. For, it recalled to her, those pleasant days of old when he wore it upon his hand at the time of their marriage and the happy years that they spent later on at Ayodhya.

"Love took up the glassy time and
Turned it in his glowing hands :
Every moment, lightly shaken
Ran itself in golden sands.

Love took up the harp of life and smote
On all chords with might,
Smote the chord of self; that; trembling,
Pass'd in music out of sight."

One day a slight cloud passed over their hearts as they were all alone and in sweet daliance. They held aloof in a huff and would never care to have speech or look.

But all the while Rama was tortured beyond his power, at being so long torn away from the arms of his beloved. There were no one to intercede and bring them together; for, they would climb down only most gracefully and would not give in. Then Rama let his signet slip down from his finger, all unconsciously as it were. At once, Sita will exclaim 'The signet has slipped away' and hand it back to him. The cloud was over and they were their old selves again. Now Sita gazed fondly at that ring that embodied so many happy associations. She could not think it enough as the great power that brought them together after an eternity of separation. She gradually beheld before her, the signet, the finger that wore it, the hand to which the finger belonged, the arms and the shoulders and the entire presence of her beloved; and fondly clasped it in embrace. Like unto the Lady of the night released from the cruel clutches of Rahu, did the face of Sita shine, with her eyes long and most gracefully tinged with red, blossomed with joy.

Then a feeling of shame came over her at the thought. "Alas! He has given me back my life; and I cruelly suspected him to be Ravana." In the height of her joy at having had news of Rama, she gazed with ever-growing fondness upon Anjaneya, as the bearer of the good tidings and said, "Best and bravest of the monkey race! It is a wonder to me how you penetrated into this *rakshasa* capital, alone, unaided and so easily. I could never praise enough your strength, power and intelligence. How did you manage to leap over so lightly, in the pride of your unparalleled prowess, this broad waste of waters, as if it were the hoof track of a cow? You faced undaunted and unconfused, the terror of the worlds, the ten-headed Ravana. So, one could never commit the mistake of classing you with the ordinary run of monkeys. My lord Rama, the most intelligent of men, has himself placed boundless trust in you and sent you on to me. So you are best fitted to have free unrestrained speech with me. My lord Raghava, whom no one can approach in his matchless power, radiance and lustre, will never send me any one whose capacities he knew not most thoroughly and whom he had not tested in every way.

Does my Lord fare well through my good fortune and the grace of god; and he the soul of righteousness and fruitful promise? Does

Lakshmana most effulgent, fare well? If it is all well with my lord Raghava, he would have by now, consumed this sea-girt earth, like unto the Fire of Dissolution. But I see it not.

Rama and his brother Lakshmana, are they not gifted with the might to destroy in a second, the entire world of the gods and the *asuras?* So I decide that the hour has not struck for the end of my sorrows. That best of men; is he thin and emaciated through grief? Is he free from regret and remorse? Is he in the full prime of courage and enthusiasm? I hope he is not whelmed with sorrow and confused of intellect in dealing with affairs of movement. I hope he pursues the aims of life as befits them. Does he pursue the means of alliance and influence in the case of his friends, out of a spirit of kindness and the other two methods of dissentions and force to foil the ends of his enemies? Does he gather about him, friends, pure of heart and purpose? Do such seek him out? Is he held by them in high respect? Does he seek strength from the gods to win me back to his side? I hope he is not slack in his attempts and efforts as befits his valour and prowess. Does he seek to win the grace and favour of the lord Narayana, the deity of his line? I hope he has not forgotten me as one who had been long separated from him and in a far away part unknown to men. I hope his love and affection towards me is ever the same. Is he minded to deliver me from this misery and that speedily? Most fitted in every way to enjoy every luxury and comfort of the highest kind, most unfitted to come within the cruel grasp of care; is it well with him? I hope sharp-toothen grief has not played havoc with his body and soul. I hope he receives news that Bharata and the ladies Kausalya and Sumitra fare well. I hope he is not consumed with the grief of being torn away from me. I hope he will concentrate all his energies upon the single purpose of delivering me from this house of sorrow and evil. Will Bharata ever devoted to Rama, despatch here for my deliverence, his ministers and countless picked warriors and veterans? May I hope to see here at no distant date, king Sugriva, followed by the monkey-warriors whose teeth and nails are their most formidable weapons? Will Lakshmana overwhelm the *rakshasa*-hoards with his stream of arrows, as befits his valour and knowledge of the mysteries of the weapons? Will I bless my eyes at no short time with the sight of Ravana and his kin lie low on the field of battle, thanks to the fiery shafts of the brothers. I hope that my lord's face, of golden splendour and of the sweet perfume of lotuses, is not dry and like unto the lotus gradually dying in the pool whose waters dry up at the touch of heat.

He put forth duty as the motive and renounced the kingdom that was his and brought with him afoot, myself to the woods, who was accustomed to a life of luxury and comfort. Yet, he felt not the slightest touch of care, fear or grief; such a one is, I hope, not low-hearted through the grief of separation. The lady Kausalya, whose soul was ever centred in him; my Lord Dasaratha who quitted his hold upon life, unable to bear away from his darling son; and his other kith and kin, cannot and do not hold a place in his heart with me. Take it from me as a gospel truth that I keep a hold upon my life only until I know that Raghunatha will deliver me from this hell."

Thus and many a wise, the lady Sita spoke in words sweet and deeply significant. Then, she paused for a reply from the most intelligent of monkeys.

Then Maruti, most valiant of warriors, raised his joined palms above his head and gave meet reply in all humility. "In the far past Anuhlada the *asura,* carried away the wife of Indra, the lady Sasi. The lord of the *devas* searched for her long and wide and came upon her prison house and won her back. So Rama had no news of your place of captivity till now".

"The red lotus in its bloom is put to shame by the loveliness of your eyes. I say that there could be no other reason for the delay in my lord's not delivering you from the clutches of Ravana. The moment I inform my lord of your whereabouts, he starts for this place at the head of the monkey-hosts. Have no doubt how they would come across this sea, a hundred *yojanas* in extent. Raghava will bridge this dreadful waste of waters with his arrows and cross over here with his forces and exterminate the infamous *rakshasa*-brood. And should the Lord of Death or the high gods or the terrible *asuras* seek to stand in his way, the very moment they meet with destruction, sure and certain. Like unto a lordly elephant, in the clutches of the monarch of the woods, does the Lord Raghava suffer grievously at being away from you. I swear to you upon the mountains Malaya, Vindhya, Meru, Mahendra, Dardura; may they shelter me no more if I swear false. I swear to you upon the fruits, the roots and the water that form my sustenance; may they give me life and strength no more, if I swear false. I say that you will bless your eyes at no distant day, with the sight of the glorious face of Rama resplendent as the full moon, in the matchless beauty of his eyes, fair lips and flashing ear-rings.

Rama has put away from himself meat and honey. He takes but a meal and that at sunset, of fruits and roots as befits the hermits. His soul is ever with you; his bodily sensations are strangers to him; he does not feel worry of the flies, the gnats, the worms and the other insects that creep over him; he does not drive them away. His love towards you absorbs him quite; black grief whelms; and no other thought finds a place in his heart. Sleep is a stranger to his eyes; and should he ever fall asleep, out of sheer weariness he awakes with the words 'Ha, Sita!' upon his lips, words dear and sweet to him. He heaves many a hot sigh, at the sight of fruits, flowers and other pleasant objects; calls upon your name and talks to you, as if you were there and spoke back to him. For, he actually believes that you are ever before him. He abates not one iota of what he should do to get you back to his side. Know you not that his courage is impregnable; know you not his plighted word is a fact accomplished and that he is the ideal king and warrior?" Sita's heart was somewhat relieved of the terrible load of anxiety that caused it, thanks to the welcome news she had of Sri Rama. But, the sufferings that he underwent at being separated from her, found a powerful echo in her heart. She resembled the orb of the moon slightly clouded at the beginning of the cold season and putting forth spasmodic gleams of radiance.

CHAPTER 37

MARUTI'S PROPOSAL

THEN, Janaki gave meet reply to Maruti in words pregnant with wisdom. 'Rama harbours no other thought in his heart; but he is buffetted by the waves of grief;' said you not so? It was a cruel kindness of yours in finding me with delicious nectar saturated with deadly venom. It was no seeking of mine that I was torn from her side. The omnipotent Fate drags about in cruel bonds and plays as it likes with Raghunatha the heir to all wealth and power and makes no difference between him and the lowest of low, tortured by adversity. It is impossible to stand up against it; and the most brilliant instances of it, myself, Rama and Lakshmana and none else are needed. I know not when the hour will strike, of his deliverance from the grasp of the ravening billows of sorrow, like a lordly ship staggering under the attacks of a stormy sea. I know not when he will lay in battle, Ravana and his *rakshasas,* reduce this Lanka to a howling waste and cast his arms about me. You must impress upon him the necessity of rescuing me, ere the last day of the year passes away, that my captor has allowed me as a respite. I quit my hold on life the next moment. The tenth month is even now drawing to an end and but two small months of time remain. Just sixty days and no more. His brother Vibhishana tried his best to persuade Ravana to send me back, but in vain. The *rakshasa* king hates the very idea. Death roams at large over the field of battle in search of Ravana, around whose neck fatal noose is cast. Surasa, the wife of Vibhishana sent me this news through her daughter Amala.

My heart and my soul are serene and clear. They resolved to accomplish superhuman achievements; the measures thereunto, the capacity therefor, tenderness, gratitude, valour, greatness of heart and many another excellence too numerous to count, vie with one another to adorn Rama. Hence, there exists not the faintest shadow of a doubt in my heart that my lord will speedily take me back to his side. Is there a foeman in all the worlds and above and below, whose heart turns not into water at the sight of my Raghuvira who laid low in dire battle, the fourteen thousand *rakshasa* warriors? And he did it alone unaided, with no Lakshmana to help him; he did it in the short space of a *muhurta;* and it was but child's play to him. His courage, his proof against fear, danger, misery and misfortune will never forsake him. The lady Sasi knows better than me, the greatness of her lord Indra and who knows better than me the greatness of my Lord? The blazing sun, Rama, will in no time, drink up the water of the lives of these *rakshasas;* and his arrow showers are but the rays, he uses for that purpose."

Thus did the lady Sita lament many a wise about Rama, her scorched heart finding a vent through her fast-falling tears.

Anjaneya heard her out; and quick and sharp came his words of consolation. "Mother of the world! What have you to do with grief and sorrow? I have but to take back to Rama, the news about you; and the next moment he is on his way here with his countless monkey-hosts. You need not go even so far as that. This very moment will I put an end to your sorrow and misfortune. Deign to seat yourself on my shoulders and before the eye has time to wink, will I cross the sea and place you beside Raghava. Doubt it not, fair lady! Have I not in me the might to take, all so lightly, this Lanka and everything upon it, wherever I like? Even as the Lord of fire takes with devout reverence, to Indra the offerings of sacrifices, will I take you back to Rama, in his abode on mount Prasravana. Mahavishnu is not more enthusiastic and confident about destroying the *asuras* than Rama and Lakshmana in exterminating the wicked *rakshasa*-brood; and those two brothers will you meet even now. The lord of the *devas* shines not more gloriously upon his throne in heaven than Sri Rama in his abode on mount Prasravana, as he busies himself with the measures to get you back; and this mighty warrior Raghava will you meet even now. So, just seat yourself on my broad shoulders. Think not highly of me and my power to make my word good. I long to see you by the side of Raghunatha even as the lady Rohini finds happiness and peace in the company of the moon. Seat yourself I say, on my broad back and course through the sky as if you would hold converse with the Lords of day and night. This Lanka and all that it holds in the shape of frightening material can never dream of barring my course, or even following me, when I bear you aloft. I take you back, as lightly as when I came in here; doubt it not, lady."

Sita was delighted at this wonderful proposal of Maruti and replied, "Hundred *yojanas* have you to cross of watery waste, ere you take me back to Kishkindha; it is really strange to hear you say so. You hereby betray the thoughtless nature of your class. A slight creature as you are, what put it into your heart to tell me that you would take me back to my lord Rama?"

And Maruti said to himself, "Lo! here is a nice position for me. This is the first time I ever meet with such a square set down. Well, it is natural for her to speak so. What does she know of my boundless strength and might; and that what is impossible to others is but a child's play to me. So, let me show her that I can take any form at will." And he grew and grew until the eye failed to follow him. He leapt down from the tree and sought to inspire to win her trust by towering aloft before her, higher and more huge than Meru, Mandara or any other mountain; his splendour blazed out like the Lord of fire at his height. Mountainous of bulk, red in face, boundless of strength, armed with teeth and nails like the bolt of Indra, he stood before Sita in his terrible shape and cried, "Mother! This Lanka, the hills, the mountains, the forests, the fortifications, the houses, the creatures and Ravana, the lord of all these, are but a straw to me, were I minded to bear them away. So slight me not, doubt me not. Collect your thoughts and accept my offer of service; for, you would have thereby dispelled the grief of Rama and Lakshmana."

Janaki cast a look of fondness and affection at the son of Vayu, as he stood before blazing dreadfully like the lord Rudra, on the day of the Universal Dissolution; and said, "Most mighty of the monkey-world! Full well, do I know your strength and valour. Full well do I know that in speed and force, you are the peer of your father; and in wonderful lustre and radiance, of the Lord of fire. I know of no other but yourself, no ordinary person, who could singly and unaided, lightly leap over these broad waters, penetrate undaunted into this Lanka, teeming with terrible *rakshasas* and hold speech with me most skilfully. Full well do I know that you are extremely capable of bearing me aloft through the sky. It behoves us to seek the speediest means of effecting the purpose of Rama."

"But, it is not meet that I go with you. May be I may lose my hold upon consciousness through the inconceivable rapidity of your flight, equalling that of the lord Vayu. May be that my heart would grow faint and I slip away into the sea, as you rise higher and higher over it in your course through the sky. There the whales, the crocodiles and the other frightful creatures of the deep will make short work of me. Full well do I know that you are matchless in your wonderful ability to destroy one that stands against you. But I am sure that, should you take me with you in your flight, you will run deadly peril; for, the moment that my absence is detected, Ravana is sure to send after you, mighty *rakshasas* to slay you and take me back. You will be hemmed by them, alone and unaided, while they assail you in ever-increasing numbers with clubs, bars, tridents and other frightful weapons."

"Then, you will have a three-fold task on your heads. You must fight with them to death; you must defend yourself; and you must keep danger and harm away from me. Now you can't do all the three at the same time; so, I doubt not that you will bring death upon yourself."

"Again, may be I will slip down from your shoulders, unable to bear the dreadful sight of your terrible battle with the *rakshasas*. Then they will somehow or other manage to bring you within their power; for, such is their dreadful strength and might. May be I will slip down from your shoulders while you are absorbed in the fight and unable to attend to me; and right away do I fall once more into their clutches. They may even take me from you, but put me to death."

"Of course, I hear you say to yourself 'Am I to be classed and confounded with the herd? Dare they foil me and bear you back from my protecting arm?' Now I need not tell you that victory and defeat are no certain factors, once that you put into a fight. They may frighten me, they may torture me to death; and then, all this trouble of yours, all these skilful plans would go to waste."

"Again, you are quite capable of exterminating the *rakshasa*-world; but do you not see that it takes away a great deal from the fame of our lord Raghava? The naughty world will point at him with scorn and cry, 'Lo! he had not it in him to face the dreadful lord of Lanka; he despatched a monkey of his in secret to steal back Sita; he acted no better than Ravana.''

''Again, the *rakshasas* may take me back and hide me so skilfully that the monkeys or Rama and Lakshmana cannot come at me. Then, all your trouble, all your efforts on my behalf go to waste. Go back to Raghunatha; take him news of me; and bring him back. I tell you it is the best plan. But, should you ignore it and seek to take me back with you, I may, by a mischance, fall again into the hands of the *rakshasas* and you have seen the last of me. Then my Raghava will die of grief. Next, his brothers, mothers, Sugriva, and the monkey-hosts, all go to perdition.''

''Again it is not meet, it is not good that I should touch any other person but my lord; and I, whose heart and soul are centred in him alone. But hear you say, to yourself, ''And the infamous Ravana defiled you with his touch''. Then I was alone and helpless; I am a frail woman; my protectors were far away. And a *rakshasa,* of boundless strength, most cruel, how could I stop him when he bore me away by violence? But I did my very best; I fought hard but in vain. It is most consonant to the high and noble ancestry of Rama, his valour, his prowess, his fame and the love he bears to me, that he comes here; and before all the world, takes me back, laying low in battle dire, my captor Ravana and all that follow him. For, full well do I know that the gods, the *pannagas,* the *gandharvas,* the *rakshasas* and others dare not face him on the field of battle. I was there to witness his prowess when he slew Viradha, Khara, Dushana and the countless *rakshasas* of Janasthana. And ere he married me, has, as I have heard, lightly slain Maricha, Subahu and Tataka. And I need not tell you how he killed Kabandha and Vali; for, it was you that told me about it. Just imagine to yourself a scene of the field of battle with Rama and Lakshmana, the best and foremost of bowmen, stand side by side. Who would dare even to lift his eyes upto them? They rival the Lord of the celestials in boundless might and strength. Just imagine my Raghuvira facing his foes on the battle field, like unto an elephant in rut, or like unto the Lord of day, who at the time of destruction of the worlds, unveils his thousand eyes and eight and shoots his deadly beams at the helpless creation. Lo! there he shines in his matchless radiance with the faithful Lakshmana by his side. He bends his redoubtable *kodanda;* he twangs it; and earth and heaven tremble in affright; he sends his death- dealing shafts in a continuous stream at the vast embattled hosts of foes; and like serpents of doom, he spreads havoc and destruction around. Then, who could ever stand up to them and boast of having come out of it alive?"

"So, best and bravest of monkeys! Look to it that Rama and Lakshmana, Sugriva and their myriads of monkey-warriors, be here as soon as possible. Long have I solaced myself with the thought that my lord, my husband, my love, would be here soon. I have never taken my eyes off the path of which he would find his way here. In that hope have I borne with infinite patience, my troubles, my miseries and the taunts and the insults of these demons around. I am worn out to a shadow. On you I place my last hope to find out the most effective means to restore me to joy, to life and to fame before the world."

CHAPTER 38

KAKASURA

THE words of lady Sita gladdened the heart of Hanuman, of very keen intellect; and he hastened to reply, "Lady! You speak in entire consonance to the nature of womenfolk and the humility and lordliness of heart of noble wives. It is not possible, as you say, for a woman like you, to cross this waste of waters over hundred leagues in extent and that, on my shoulders. Again, you will not touch any other man, but my lord Rama. I tell you once more that it befits you, the beloved wife of that great soul. I know of none other that would speak so. Trust me to place before my master, everything that I see and hear in this home of your exile. I spoke a little while ago with a pure heart and out of no other motive. I desired to do what would please my lord most. I took the liberty of free talk with my queen; and there are more reasons behind. Verily, it is no easy task to cross this vast sea. It is no holiday talk to cross this sea and find a way into this Lanka so closely guarded, night and day by terrible *rakshasas*. Yet, it is possible for me to perform what I promised; and others will not find it so light. Hence my seemingly careless speech. My love and devotion towards Raghava, my sincere and humble reverence to yourself, impels me most powerfully to take you to his side, this very moment. Else, I would never have dreamt of speaking so rashly as it would seem."

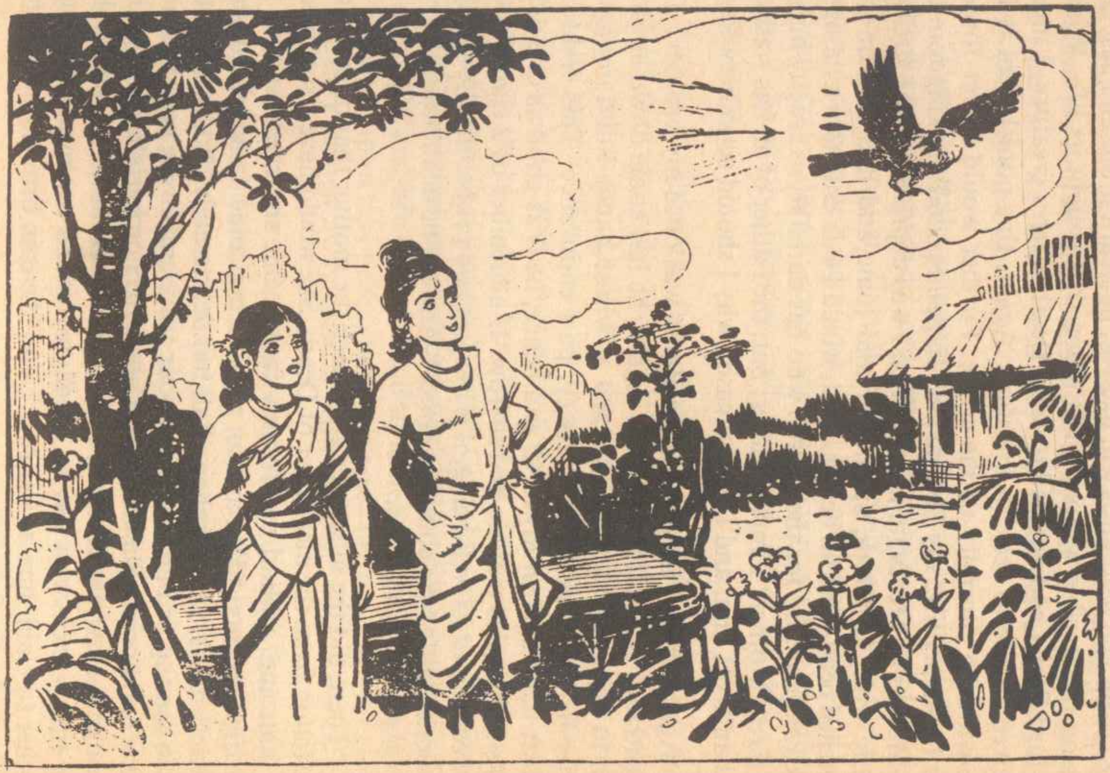
"Should you feel disinclined to go with me where my lord abides, I pray you acquaint me with such facts of the past that might convince Raghava that I had speech with you."

Then, did lady Sita set about to narrate certain incidents that happened to her when she was alone in the forest with her husband. The past rushed upon her with overwhelming force and brought into sharp contrast, her present life of miserable exile. Her fast-falling tears made her speak low and indistinct. "Anjaneya! Once in the past, we happened to stay for a while, at the holy spot hard by the stream Mandakini. It was to the north-east of mount Chitrakuta and the favourite resort of *siddhas* and hermits; for, it was ever fresh in fruit, roots and water. I will tell you of an accident that happened to us there. You may take this to my beloved, as a sign of recognition."

"One day I happened to disport myself overmuch with fruits in the groves and the glades teaming with fruits and flowers of infinite variety; and then, I rested for a while on your lap. Then, a crow roamed for meat, came up to where we were and pecked at my breast. I hit it with a pebble and drove it off. But it tasted blood and the wicked creature came back again and again and tortured me, however hard I tried to drive it off. It hovered round and never got away. I got up in wild excitement to free myself from the bother of the crow. My upper garment slipped away and I clutched at it sharp with my girdle and rushed at the bird angrily. I struck at it again and again and chased it about; but, as often, it pecked at me and not let go. Then you ridiculed my weakness at not being able to drive away a foolish bird. I was overwhelmed with shame and wrath beyond words. But you calmed me with many a soothing word and act. Then, quite tired, I rested my head again on your lap. My tears fell fast at the thought of my inability to defend myself against a puny crow that worried me. Well, I consoled myself as best as I could. I hope you will remember the scene full well." I slept long and soundly, for, I was dead tired; and he in turn lay upon my lap out of sheer weariness. Then, the wicked crow came up again and even as I got up from the lap of Raghava, rushed at me and plunged its iron beak between my breasts. It hit me again and tore and bit off pieces of flesh with deliberate cruelty. Hot blood flowed fast from the gaping wound and chanced to break the slumbers of Raghunatha. His might was so terrible that it could consume to nothing, his most invincible foes, even while he was sleeping profoundly. At last, all powerless to defend myself against an insignificant bird, I roused him."

"Then did the hero behold in all its enormity what the crow had dared to do, the sharp beak dripping hot blood and the lacerated breast of mine quivering in agony. His breath came hard and fast and furious like the serpent of doom as he cried, "Life of my life! Who is it that has dared to tear at your breasts in this horrible manner? Who would play lightly with the five-headed serpent hissing for the offender?" His eyes fell upon the crow with its cruel beak and claws dripping with my blood. It was, as we came to know, Jayanta, the son of Indra. It became aware that the wrath of Raghava was roused and would be shot at him. 'Ho, Ho! I am lost' cried he; and before the eye had time to wink, it disappeared in the earth. Raghuvira thought for a while and came to know who the crow was and what he was therefor. Fire flashed from his eyes at the cruel insult put upon his trusting wife so frightfully mangled. He decided to punish it most cruelly. His terrible bow and arrows were not there to hand. It mattered not. He drew out a blade of straw from the seat on which he reclined; he invested it with the might of the dread weapon of Brahma and sent it after the senseless crow. The missile blazed like the fire of doom and chased the bird across the skies."

"Then the crow ran, flew, dodged, vanished and used all his arts and wiles to escape the fatal dart. It was all in vain. It cried out in mad appeal to all and several, to protect it from death and roamed over the world. Alas! it found no response; for, who would stand between it and the arrow of Rama?"



"Then it bethought itself of its mighty father, the Lord of the celestials and rushed to him with piteous cries. Indra beheld its cruel *asura* form and wild misery in its eyes; he heard it out and cast his eyes on the terrible weapon of Brahma that sought its life. When my lord Rama had decided to send Death after a creature, I must be tired of life to seek to interfere. Again, this punishment is in line with the enormity of the crime. Further would I ever forget that I owe my life, my honour, my happiness and my kingdom to the Mother of Mercy, at a time when I was deprived at one stroke, of my wife, kingdom, splendour and fame and had to hide my wretched head from all beings. And, would I ever entertain a thought of kinship or pity for the wretch who has dared to so cruelly insult the Great Mother? I am his father; but, the Father of all has washed his hands off him; and I see no reason why I should act otherwise."

'Again, shall I forget that Sri Rama was once my brother? To offend him is to offend myself. Again, he has come down among men to lay low, the dread Ravana at whose hands I and my gods suffer insult, disgrace and misery, past endurance. This creature has set itself against my lord; and hence, he is as good as one who seeks to bring us trouble and sorrow. If a member of a clan stands between it and its well-being, it is but just and proper that he should be sacrificed for the common good." And so, he deliberately drove out Jayanta with curses.

"Then, did the miserable crow seek the mother that bore it, for protection from the messenger of Death. She would have a soft heart for him and a blind eye for his faults. But she cried to him in horrified accents. "You are not my son, but some dreadful monster of wickedness. The Mother of all has deliberately chosen to come down among us and wipe away our tears and bring peace to our hearts and homes. She has placed our fetters on herself and is going through sorrow, misfortune, troubles and privations, unspeakable; and this wretch who has so cruelly offended my mother has no mother to claim him as her son"; and she too, drove it away with blows and curses.

"Then, the crow appealed for protection, to its brother gods. 'Well, well,' said they, 'We owe our eternal youth and joy and power and wisdom to the Lord Mahavishnu who gave us the Waters of

Immortality to drink at a time when the *asuras* would have taken it from us by force. His mighty arm led us on to victory and ruled over the world of the shining ones. Our patron saint, the god of our hearths and homes, should his eyes ever blaze with wrath at us, where are we then?' And they too would have nothing to do with the god-forsaken crow."

"Then, Jayantha sought refuge with birds like itself. But, they were not to be so easily deluded with its persuasive appeals for mercy. 'Our lord and master, Garuda thinks himself supremely blessed at being chosen to bear Sri Rama, the Lord of the worlds. And, why did this wretch dare to come to us, who has roused the slumbering fires of the wrath of Raghuvira?' And they tore it and drove it out from them.

"Then it fell at the feet of the *maharshis*. They were kind-hearted; they were holy. They had the right and the privilege to speak to the Lord on his behalf. But they saw into the past, the present and the future. 'We are in for trouble and danger, if we harbour this stupid crow. Rama himself will deliver it from misery. Again, the crow is the most despised of the birds. It is a crime for us even to look at him. For, the lady Sita, the Great Mother, stands between the whole creation and the Lord, as the intercessor and secures for them, light and life eternal. And to him, who has dared to lay his foul touch upon her, peace, happiness and life are, for ever close.' And, they turned away from it with disgust."

"Thus Jayanta roamed again and again through the earth, the middle-world and the realm of the gods. The holy *rishis* on earth, the birds in the heavens and the gods in the world of light, the very parents that gave him birth, all put him away. But he would not die; he begged for protection and refuge of each and every one that he came across, in mad despair. He sought for refuge in each and every hiding place that he could get at; he was driven away with taunts, blows and curses."

"Then he sought the feet of Raghuvira, the Lord of the worlds. If it so chanced that the Great Mother of Mercy, herself should accuse a man before the Lord, he would reply proudly 'My people can never be guilty of any offence. And even if they might be charged with it, it would amount to no serious crime with me'. And he would cast his shield of protection over his chosen ones. And even him did Jayanta appeal to, for mercy and protection from a horrible fate."

"Further, Sri Rama came of the line of kings of which Kakutstha was a shining ornament. And he stood between Indra and the powerful *asuras* and brought defeat and disgrace upon the enemies of the gods. Now, Sri Rama's heart grew soft at the son of that self-same Indra. Death was the lightest penalty for the unspeakable crime he had perpetrated. But the poor wretch had, by that time, suffered enough in his mad search through the worlds. He had lost all hope in others, he had thrown himself at the feet of him who sent Death after him. Moreover, to protect the weak and the suffering, to wipe away the tears of the miserable, is the life work of Raghunandana. And so, he looked at the crow with pity and affection as it was lying at his feet. All creation looks up to him and to no other, for peace and plenty, happiness and protection. The crow has had enough of suffering as it roamed through the worlds and found all its efforts barren. It had come back to the Giver of all good. It had put away the unreal and elected the real, the eternal. So, its misery, its agony, its tears touched his heart; but the weapon of Brahma must have its object. "Jayanta! I leave you off lightly and give you back your lost life, if you promise to sacrifice your right eye to the dread messenger of Death that has you in its grip." Jayanta was only too glad to escape on those conditions, and lost his right eye, for life; and what it meant was yet left to him. Then he bowed in reverence to his protector Raghuvira and Dasaratha that gave to the world his great-souled son; and took his way back to his world on high, sadder but wiser."

"Lord of the worlds! Did you not go out of your way to send a Brahmastra after a puny crow? I am very curious to know what impels you to put up with this as puny a *rakshasa,* who stole me from you and blackened your face and subjects me to unheard of insults and cruelties. Of boundless spirit and energy, am I beneath your notice and beyond the pale of your mercy? Your name is synonymous with utter impossibility to see any creature in sorrow or suffering; it would be more consonant with your fame to put your principle into practice and wipe away the blinding tears of myself, who have no refuge but in you. Else, you will be denied all claim to the proud title of the ideal man and king. Keep hold of it at any cost. I have, as my lord and protector, the ruler of the worlds; and yet I am the most helpless creature in existence."

"One day, I chanced to ask you when we were alone 'Just let me know the rule of life that lies next to your heart. What is your ideal of duty?' This reminds me of the traveller who is asked to pay his fare after he gets into the ferry boat. And you answered promptly, 'The noblest rule of life is not to see a fellow-being in misery and grief. That lies next to my heart. Nay, it is ingrained in the core of my very being'. And this, I had, from your own lips; no messenger or friend brought a report of it to me. But the rule of life you set for yourself, is honoured more in the breach than in the observance." Now, Anjaneya, fail not to put it to my lord as strongly as you can."

"Tell him besides, "No one knows, as well as I do, that you are adorned with infinite excellences, valour, spirit and strength; you are like unto the vast deep in fortitude; you stand aloft deep-rooted like unto the golden mount Meru; your sway extends over this sea-girt earth, even as Indra holds sway over the kingdom of the celestials." No one has ever heard of my Raghuvira go back on his word. No one has ever sounded the depths of his valour and strength. Then, how is it that he holds back his unerring shafts from the hearts of these wicked night-rangers? The *nagas,* the *gandharvas,* the *asuras* and the *devas* are but light chaff before the on-rushing might of the arrows of Rama, the messengers of Death. I wonder his keen shafts have not yet pierced the hearts of these workers of evil, these black-hearted *rakshasas,* if, as I believe fondly, that I lie next to his heart and that he burns with a consuming desire to free me from this vile bondage. Nay, it is quite enough if he passes an order to his brother Lakshmana; for, is he not the prince of heroes, the mightiest of the mighty, the holy terror of his foes? He can very easily get permission of Sri Rama to throw his shield over me. The embattled hosts of the heaven-world dare not stand before the brothers, whose speed and splendour put to shame the lords of fire and air, if they are together; then, why do they not waste a thought upon my poor self? Is it that their might has left them and they are powerless to exterminate my tormentors and free me from this durance vile? It is now months, since I was torn from his arms and yet no sign or shadow of any such enterprise on his part. If he, but has the faintest idea of the taunts, the insults and the misery, I go through every moment, they would think their very lives, well- sacrificed to free me from Ravana. And am I not worth it?''

''So I am driven to the conclusion that either they or I must be guilty. The world counts them as entirely capable of doing what I pray for. Then, the whole blame falls upon me and no doubt of it. Well, I do not pretend to be all wise. I may have all unknown to me, stained my soul with sin or crime or impropriety. And it dogs my steps until I pay it to the uttermost. A cause cannot fail to produce an effect.''

''Ah! Now that I remember it. He refused to take me with him to the woods; and I replied most impudently ''Alas! My father was most outrageously deceived into taking you for a man; he knew not that you were but a faint-hearted woman, cleverly disguised as a man.'' That one word is more than enough to shut the gates of his mercy upon me. That crime cannot be washed away by any amount of penitence or penance during the endless cycles of Time.''

Thus, did lady Sita pour her heart out in wild grief, her fast falling tears choking out the words, even as they arose. Anjaneya was shaken to his depths at this and cried out, ''Mother of the universe! you know not that my lord Rama is hopelessly sunk in the ocean of grief. Bereft of you, his heart takes no delight in the pleasures of life. And Lakshmana, but reflects his misery a thousand-fold. I swear it on truth, right and virtue; I have gone through all this trouble, danger and difficulty to have speech with you. And I see no reason why you should have anything to do with sorrow or tears hereafter. This moment has seen the last of your miseries. The mighty brothers, the Lords of creation, are burning with eager desire to have a sight of you and will reduce this proud Lanka to a heap of ashes. They will slay out of hand, this wicked Ravana, his kith and kin and lead you back to Ayodhya. So, give me the message I should take back to Raghava, Lakshmana, the puissant Sugriva and his myriads of monkey-heroes.''

And to him replied Sita, with unsteady accents, "Maruti! Women desire children to secure their happiness here and peace hereafter and to protect them from want and danger. The lady Kausalya did not do so. The noblest of women, she observed countless fasts, penances, vows and privations to beget a son, that should cast his shadow over the countless worlds and make them live in peace and happiness; and she had her wish. Now, is it likely that her prayers will go barren? And am I not one of the countless millions, he has come down to save from evil and sorrow? In fact, it is utterly improper of me, to pray for his protection; for, the burden of it lies more upon him than upon myself. Delay has made me overstep the bounds of my duty. I, but, urge him on with no other motive. It is quite enough for me if he has the power to destroy my grief. Then I am in every way guaranteed of my heart's wishes. I but have to pray that his right arm and heart should ever wax in power and mercy in the case of those that seek refuge with him. So, tell my lord Raghuvira, that I only wanted to assure myself of his well-being. Tell him that I laid my head at his feet. For, if I had anything to pray of him like the commanalty, this humble reverence of mine is quite enough to secure me my object."

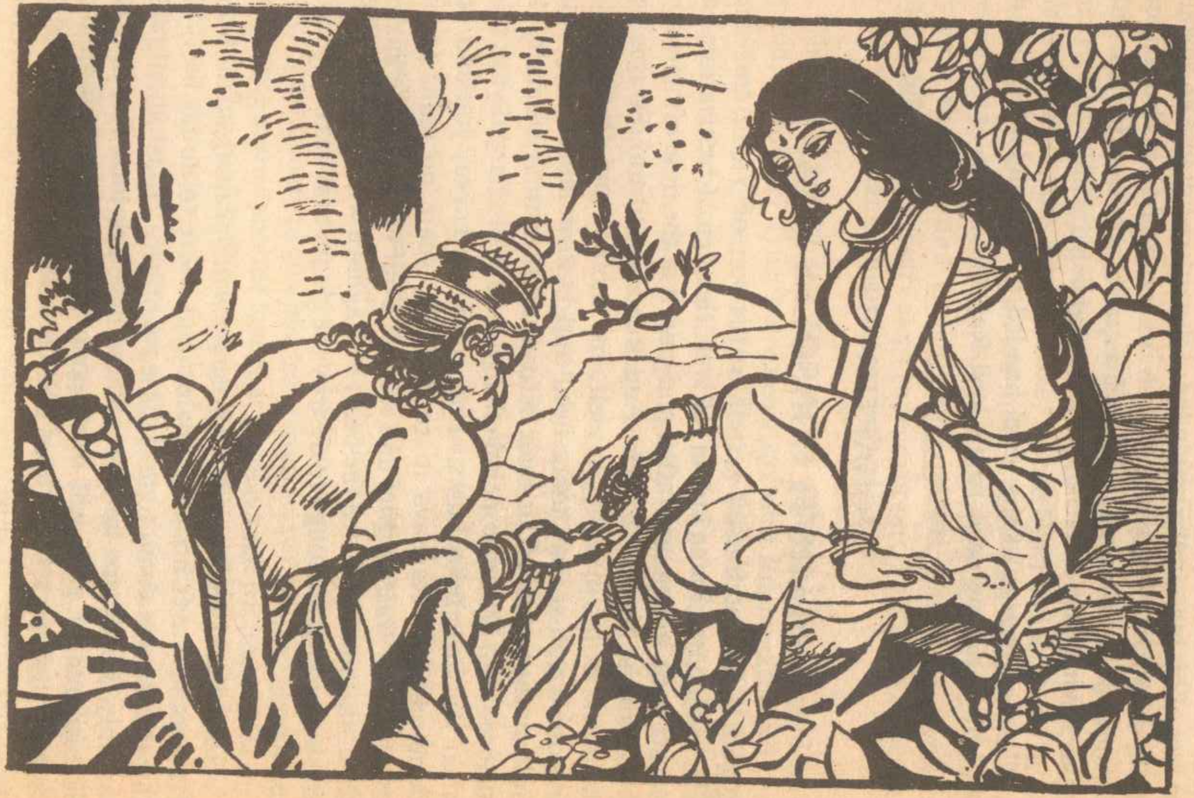
"Garlands, gems, luxuries, that the heart may desire to the uttermost, loving wives and everything that this broad earth could give a man, Lakshmana has without a pang, without a regret, put away behind him; he sought leave of his parents in all humility to follow his brother out of the over-whelming love and devotion to him. He lives but to wait upon his brother and serve him every way in the wild forests and watch over him. Of mighty shoulders like unto the monarch of the forests and long powerful arms, noble and magnanimous by nature, endowed with a charming presence, he looks upon me as the mother that bore him and upon Rama as the father of whose loins he came. Ever reverent and worshipful of his elders, he was marked out for the unique honour and privilege of serving Rama at all times, in all places and in all ways. There is nothing to which he cannot turn his hand as a master-craftsman. A man of a few words, he takes his place along with my father-in-law, the king Dasaratha, whose favourite son he was. No less is he in my affection; for, he is the noblest of men, the embodiment of Truth. Meant by nature and inclination to be the brother of Rama, he never failed to carry out the orders of his master. Rama forgets the poignant sorrow caused by the death of his father, in that Lakshmana is ever before him to gladden his heart. Pure of thought, word and deed, soft of heart, dear to Raghava as the very apple of his eye, I desire you to tell him that I would know that he fares well and that I would be pleased if he bestows a thought upon me and my sufferings. I am sure that he is all unaware of my being spirited away by this Ravana; else, my miseries would have been over long ago."

"Anjaneya! I look to you and to no other to see that Raghava wipes away my tears and brings comfort to my heart. Best and bravest of the monkey-world! I trust you and no other to do this for me. It is through your skill and might, that Raghava should take the necessary steps to rescue me from this dread island-prison. I pray you, take this my message to Rama, the prince of heroes and my lord as well; and the son of Dasaratha. A short month lies between me and a cruel death. This is true and you have my word for it. In the far past, Indra the lord of the celestials, foully put to death the *asura* Vritra, who was a holy *brahmana*. The sin of it drove him from heaven, from his kingdom, from his wealth and affluence and pursued him through the worlds. Poor and miserable he found favour with the lord Vishnu, who conducted a horse-sacrifice for him, in which the other gods helped him. His sin fell away from him like a dark cloak and he was once more bright and happy.

"Even so, the sinful wretch of Ravana put a glamour over me and I am here in vile bondage. Whom have I to call upon to free me from this except your merciful self. Maruti! Repeat this message of mine to him every now and then, until he sets about to effect my deliverance."

And she took from a fold of her garments, a lovely ornament that shone of yore amidst her dark tresses and gave it to Maruti as a sign of recognition. He received it in humble reverence and tried to fit in on his finger. But he forgot that he had changed his vast proportions for a very subtle form; and it failed to fit in.

Then Hanuman went round her in reverent adoration and stood by with joined hands. His body was in Lanka, dilated with boundless



joy and having come upon the lady Janaki. But his heart was at the feet of his master at Kishkindha. Like unto a hill shaken a while ago by a tornado, Anjaneya, who was about to quit his hold upon life in despair at having failed in his quest, was transported with joy at having met her in the *asoka* grove.

He took charge of the jewel handed to him and set about to carry the welcome news to his lord Raghava.

CHAPTER 39

MARUTI CONSOLES SITA

WHEN Sita addressed herself to the son of Vayu, and said, "Anjaneya! Rama knows full well, this sign of recognition. My mother took it from my father and gave it at the time of marriage, to Dasaratha for me to wear. And Rama saw it too. So this will call back to his memory, myself, my mother and Dasaratha. I admonish you to pay more heed and bestow more energy and enthusiasm in this affair than before and plan most carefully the further steps. Do not conclude that you have discharged your duty when you have taken news of me to my lord. For, you and you alone can lead Raghava to success. So, spare no pains to put an end to my wasting grief and sorrow. Your never-ceasing anxiety about the moment when the heart of Raghava will bloom in peace and happiness, is enough to destroy the gloom that lies heavy upon my heart."

Maruti laid those words, so pregnant with meaning, to his heart. He bent low over his joined palms and swore to do his best. She saw that he was about to take his leave of her. "Alas! Should this, my only friend here, go away, whom have I to look for, in need? The billows of grief will once again whelm me." This thought brought hot tears to her ears and choked her utterance. Yet she managed to say "I pray you, take my kind enquiries to Rama, Lakshmana, Sugriva, his ministers and the other monkey-lords, grown grey in age and wisdom as befits their rank. Once again, I tell you that it rests upon yourself and no other that my lord Rama lifts me up from the dark depths of grief and misfortune. On you, I place all my hopes, that Raghava comes here before I quit my hold upon life. And merit untold and supreme, will be your meed. The son of Dasaratha is famed through the worlds as the protector and refuge of all created beings and of his kith and kin especially. He is known to the world as one, whose heart cannot bear to see another grieve. And it is all the more a duty with him, to free me, were it but to preserve his fair name. Keep up his spirit from flagging by your energetic and enthusiastic counsels; and Rama will, of surety, take the necessary steps to recover me. This is the right way to fan unto a flame, his valour and might."

Then, Anjaneya raised his joined palms over his head and replied, "Mother! Trust me when I say that Raghunatha will, at no distant time, be here with the monkey-hosts at his back. He will scatter his foes before him like chaff and wipe away the tears that dim your fair eyes. When he twangs his mighty bow and fits his messengers of death to it, man nor god nor *asura* will be in a hurry to stand in the way. He has it in him, to put to rout Indra, Yama, Surya and the countless hosts of *devas,* if they stand between him and your deliverance. He and he alone is marked out, as the protector and ruler of the sea-girt earth. Something tells me that you will lead him on the fame, honour and profit."

These words of Anjaneya so clear, so true and so forcible, brought comfort to the heart of lady Sita. She looked upon him again and again with fondness, for, she would see no more of him a few minutes hence. She was loath to give him leave to go away from her. She spoke to him once more upon the love that Raghava felt for her. "Bravest of the monkey-heroes! Should you feel in any way tired, I would advise you to stay here a day, hid in some safe retreat and go back tomorrow. My unfortunate self forgets for a while my consuming grief, were you near me to console and cheer. Yet I am not so sure that my life-breaths will hold until you go away from here, take my message to Rama and lead him to this den of evil. Nay, I doubt it not. So, I adjure you to hasten his visit as far as possible. I was a prey to unspeakable grief, ere you came to me. Your presence and your brave words chased it away. And now I am to see no more of you. Alas! The old gloom and misery will surge upon me with accumulated force."

"Monkey-lord! I will unburden myself of a lurking doubt that troubles me ever, and it is this. How could Rama, Lakshmana and his monkey-hosts cross this vast and dreadful waste of waters? I see none that could successfully do it, except your mighty self, the lords Garuda and Vayu. You have no peer in effecting your purpose most skilfully. What, see you to surmount this tremendous obstacle to our plans? Alone and by yourself you can lightly accomplish this object and your fame will shine through all eternity, should you do so. But it would be more pleasing to me, more honourable and more glorious, if my lord Raghava marches over here with his brave monkey-hosts, lays low the wretch of a Ravana and leads me back proudly to Ayodhya. And it will be befitting his proud fame as the ideal warrior if that holy terror of his foes should shake this Lanka to its foundations, by his keen shafts and leads me back before all the world. So, it behoves you as a bounden duty to plan so, that his fair fame and his valour are not dimmed even the slightest, but shine forth most brilliantly."

Hanuman drank with eager ears, the message of the lady Sita so wise, so intelligent and so pregnant and suggestive. "My lady!" said he, "Sugriva, the monarch of the monkey-world, knows no limits to his strength and valour. He has set his heart upon finding out your whereabouts at any cost and lead you back to the side of his lord Rama. Millions and millions of brave monkey-heroes follow him as he sets himself to exterminate this vile *rakshasa*-brood. Believe me, when I say, that each and every one of those that call him their lord, is endowed with valour, energy, strength and speed to the utmost. Nothing bars their way over the worlds. Of boundless splendour and glory, the greatest and the most dangerous exploits tire them not the least. It is a pastime to them to course round this broad earth again and again with ever-increasing energy. I speak the bare truth when I say, that each and every one that stand before my lord Sugriva, is my superior, or at least my equal. There is none that counts himself lower. I have managed to find my way here and what bars their path to this Lanka?"

"I need not tell you that kings do not send their best men out on such a quest. The common rank and file are generally chosen for it. The monkey-lords take out one flying leap from their home to this sea-girt isle. Grieve not, my lady; put away sorrow behind you. Those lords of men, of boundless spirit and might, the brothers Rama and Lakshmana, will seat themselves on my broad shoulders; like unto the Lords of day and night, rising together in the heavens, they will come to you here in a trice. Their arrows will reduce this Lanka to a heap of ashes. I assure you that my lord Rama will lay low on the field of battle this Ravana and his dark hosts. I assure you that he will lead you back happy and glorious to fair Ayodhya. So, take heart, noble lady! All good go with you. A few days stand between this and the moment of destruction of this ten-headed monster. Very soon, sooner than you think, will you behold my lord Raghava, irradiating this gloomy isle with his blazing presence; he will deal death to Ravana and you will, in joy, cross over the ocean of grief and misery that had submerged you for a while."

Thus did Maruti console Sita and prepare to start. Yet he spoke again to put more heart and spirit into her. "Mother of mine! I swear upon everything holy and dear to me. Raghuvira the lord of the mighty bow, the terror of his foes, will not spare any pains to find his way here. He will take his stand and his brother by his side before the gates of Lanka. Countless myriads of monkeys will surround this in embattled array with no other weapons, but what nature had endowed them with, in the shape of teeth and nails. Like unto the lordly lion and fierce tiger, like unto the huge elephants in rut in hue, they will darken this isle, the slopes of mount Malaya. Huge of bulk like the mountains over which they roam, their roars will make the surcharged rain-clouds quake in terror. These will darken earth and sky. Like unto an elephant in the relentless grip of the lion, Raghava is pierced to the heart with the grief of being torn away from your side. Mother of mine! Grieve not. Let no care or anxiety find a place in your heart. The lady Sachi was for a while, parted from her lord Indra; even so, you are spirited away from Rama but to meet him at no distant day. Know you of any, that stand higher than he? Know you of any, that can take the place of Lakshmana? And they, the noble brothers, like unto the lords of fire and air, are there to protect you, This dreadful island is groaning under the burden of its dark-hearted monsters and will not hold you along as its prisoner.

Do you think that it would take a long time for your lord to find his way here? You have but to wait in patience until I carry news of you to him."

CHAPTER 40

MARUTI CONSOLES SITA *(Continued)*

HER spirits rose high at the words of encouragement that Maruti gave expression to; and the lady Sita once more addressed herself to him in words conducive to her well-being and happiness. "Even as corn half ripe and about to yield golden fruit, caught in the grip of the deadly heat of summer and drought, recovers its life, strength and beauty when the god-sent rains gladden it again, I at first revelled in the enjoyment of everything that the heart could wish for, in the company of my beloved Rama. Then I had to pass through a streak of ill-luck, unspeakable misfortunes, that made me decide to take my life into my hands. Then you came to me; your words, like unto the waters of immortality, gave me back the life that I had almost counted as lost. I pray you, out of your boundless compassion, to so plan that I bless my eyes with a sight of that ideal man and king and hold him in my arms, weak and emaciated with sorrow and grief, as long as my heart could desire. Ask him to call back to memory those incidents of the far past, known to ourselves alone, when he sent the Brahmastra after the puny crow and deprived it of its right eye. Ask him to remind himself of that day, when we two were all by ourselves on the slopes of a hill and he chanced to observe the beauty mark of my cheeks, effaced somewhat and hastened to replace it by another of the ore of *manosila*.

"My Raghuvira like unto Indra, Varuna and the other regents of the quarters, put up calmly with an unspeakable insult from the hands of a wretch of a *rakshasa,* who abducts his beloved wife and holds her in durance for months together. I wonder how he can do it. Tell him, 'I have till now preserved most carefully the crest-jewel that you so lovingly made a present of to me. It solaced my dark hours even as if I had you by my side. And now I send it back to you, that only source of life and light to me. Hence I cannot, even if I would keep my hold upon life suffering as I do, from being torn away from your side most cruelly. Taunts, insults, injuries, that any other would have succumbed to, from these dreadful *rakshasis* around me — all this and more have I borne patiently, only in the hope that you would at any cost deliver me and in the fond belief that you hold the lives of your foes in the hollow of your hand. I cling to dear life but for the short space of a month. If I fail to meet you by that time you may count me dead. Ravana is cruel beyond belief; he is frightful to behold; and I can never bring myself to lift my eyes to him; and should I ever hear that you too are slack in your efforts to come to me, you may take it from me that the next moment marks my exit from this world."

Hanuman listened to the lady Sita as she poured out her heart to him in the midst of blinding tears. He hastened to render her meet reply. "Noble lady! My lord Raghuvira sets himself not to come at you, only because he knows not where you are kept; and the grief in consequence almost overwhelms him. The moment he has news of your whereabouts, he will take the necessary steps to deliver you from this dark prison-house. I swear this by the God of truth himself. And Lakshmana his twinself, the soul of his soul, has no place in his heart for any other thought when he beholds Rama sunk in grief. Well, it is all over and behind us now. I congratulate myself upon having come at you after all this trouble and danger. You have no call to grieve hereafter. This moment has struck the death-knell of all your dark and unhappy past. Those noble brothers, whose shafts bring the message of relentless death to their foes, those lords of men, are all eager to have a sight of your fair self. Their arrows will reduce this Lanka to a heap of ashes; Ravana and his dark brood will very soon be a thing of the past and the brothers will lead you back to Ayodhya in joy and glory. I pray you, gentle lady, remind yourself of any other sign of recognition in your past that would be most familiar to him and gladden his heart."

And to him replied Sita : "Those that I have entrusted you with, are the best of their kind. The sight of this jewel of mine will bring to his heart utter trust and confidence in you and your message."

Then Maruti secured about him the jewel, saluted the lady Sita in humble reverence and his face bright at the consciousness of his purpose well accomplished, prepared to return. Sita beheld him in wonder and joy as he grew and grew in form, in strength and in speed and was about to spring aloft to take his course through the skies. "Alas! How shall I keep my hold upon life, now that I have parted with the jewel that I looked upon, even as I did, upon my beloved and given leave to this bringer of hope and peace to go back. Heaven knows when this faithful emissary will meet this master. Heaven only knows when my lord would be here. Alas! When would my grief-stained eyes bless themselves with the sight of my beloved? When would the moment come round that marks the end of my troubles and sorrows?" Her face grew wan; her limbs could not support her. Hot tears blinded her eyes; her voice was choked with sobs; yet she managed to say "Anjaneya! Carry my kind enquiries to Rama and Lakshmana, strong and brave as mighty lions. Convey my respectful regards to Sugriva, to his ministers and to the other monkey-heroes. I lay upon you as a supreme duty, that he should, at any cost, lift me up from the depths of grief, in which I am sunk. Seek his side and acquaint him with this sharp and poignant grief that tortures me; tell him how these *rakshasis* load me with taunts, insults and shame. May all good go with you on your way and may you ever come out victorious to your obstacles."

Thus did Anjaneya acquaint himself full well with everything about the lady Sita; he laid her message to his heart; he saw his purpose accomplished thoroughly and he set about to go back with a glad heart. But he bethought himself that something yet remained to be done; and he went back north to think it out carefully.

CHAPTER 41

MARUTI DESTROYS THE ASOKA GROVE

THEN did the lady Sita speak highly of him; and Anjaneya turned his thoughts on his journey back. So he betook himself to a spot apart and discussed the situation.

"I decided to accomplish two things — to find out the whereabouts of the lady Sita and of Ravana. Now, I have come across the lady and had speech with her. But something yet remains to be done in the matter of acquainting myself with the position of Ravana. I have gone through this Lanka as thoroughly as possible and the various likely spots in it. But I have not yet secured a complete knowledge of the strength and weakness of the *rakshasas* and the innermost plans and hopes of Ravana. And towards it, I should follow the fourth mean — war in preference to alliance, bribery and dissensions. For, alliance is out of question with the *rakshasas*. Bribery is equally so in the case of such, as command boundless wealth and luxury. Even so, it is impossible to sow dissensions among those that are inflated with the sense of unrivalled strength, might and valour.

Now, the learned tell us that we should not resort to war, because victory and defeat are uncertain factors in it. But there is also the other maxim. Everything ends well, to him of supreme might. Then defeat is not in my record, at any time to me, of matchless strength and valour. Thus I decide that prowess alone can accomplish my purpose. I see no other way to it. These *rakshasas* will come to realise what they are worth, only after all their best and bravest lie low in the field of battle.

But you may say, your lord Sugriva ordered you to find out the whereabouts of Ravana and Sita. Now is it not a crime, a breach of duty, to seek to meddle with things foreign to it. Now I think that a really capable man is one, who while carrying out the orders of his master, yet accomplishes many other objects that do not militate against it. Even for securing a very insignificant purpose, one must not trust to one's means alone; he must have strings to his bow. Such a one is verily the successful envoy, they who speak of great purposes. I would not have carried out the orders of my lord, unless I go back to him with a thorough knowledge of the strength and the weakness of the *rakshasas* and the relative worth of myself and this unholy brood of night-rangers. Should he choose to ask me details about this Lanka and its *rakshasas,* how could I satisfy him? So, I must seek for the most effective method to bring about a fight between myself and the *rakshasas* here. It is then that Ravana would be rightly impressed with the difference between myself and his armies. Then I will face this ruler of the *rakshasas* in the midst of his minister and generals; acquaint myself thoroughly with his might and his deep-laid plans about the lady Sita and go back with a cheerful heart.

Now, this *asoka* wood charms the eyes and the hearts of beholders with its strange trees and creepers. The much vaunted Nandana of Indra is nowhere before this. Should I shatter and lay in ruins, this pleasure grove of this cruel *rakshasa* like unto a forest fire grasping at the tops of tall trees, he will be mad with rage; then he will despatch his fighters to kill me; and then will come about a frightful encounter between myself and these monsters; and then my valour will consume them to nothing; and then I will go back to Kishkindha content."

Thus did Maruti take counsel with himself. Mighty rage took hold of him, even as his father lord Vayu. He put forth his dreadful strength and crashed down huge trees through the frightful speed and impact of his thighs. He made a ruin of the pleasure-grove attached to the harem.

He broke to bits, the tall and beautiful trees that graced the woods with their birds of diverse hue and shape. He shattered the tanks and water- courses. He reduced to dust the graceful hills and mountains so curiously wrought to disport upon. The birds shreaked in terror; the creepers faded and died. Lotuses and other flowers in the lakes turned black. The birds shrivelled. The once charming *asoka* grove was now unsightly to look at, even as if the forest fire passed through it. The creepers looked like girls struck dumb with terror. Pleasure houses, stone walls, pleasant bowers and other buildings, were things of the past; along with them the great serpents and the wild beasts that haunted them. That beloved garden of Ravana, once his pride and joy, was now a shapeless ruin. The evergreen wood that was the prison house of lady Sita was now consumed by the might and wrath of Maruti. The griefless (*asoka*) wood was a sorry sight to see and its trees lay uprooted and broken as if their grief was too heavy for them.

Thus did Maruti, strike deep into the pride and heart of the *rakshasa* lord; he resolved to fight single-handed with the countless *rakshasa* braves; he shone as it were, with the halo born of strength, courage and enthusiasm and stationed himself before the garden gates on the wait for his foes.

CHAPTER 42

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE WARRIOR-GUARDS

ALL Lanka, man and beast, trembled with affright, at the shrieks of the birds and the crash of shattered trees. Beast and bird were seized with a panic and betook themselves to shelter, howling and screaming most horribly. Ill omens weighed down the hearts of the *rakshasas*. The women-guards in the grove were rudely disturbed in their slumbers and beheld the magnificent grove a shapeless mass of ruin and a huge monkey gloating over his work of destruction. Maruti on his part was minded to frighten them the more and grew and grew before their eyes. At the sight of that huge creature towering aloft like a mountain and boundless in his strength and valour, they turned to Sita and cried, "Who is this? Whose man is he? Whence did he come from and why? How came it that he had speech with you? What did he say to you? Speak and fear not."

And to them Sita, of matchless perfection rendered meet reply. "Far from me is it to prey and gauge into the black hearts and cruel wiles of *rakshasas* who could change their forms at will. You know best who he is and what he will do. A serpent's warp are best known to its kind. Do you doubt it? Abject terror held me, in its grip even as it did you all. I know nothing about this creature. Methinks it is some *rakshasa* come here who could take forms at will."

Thereat the monsters fled on all sides and vanished from view. Some ugly specimens of the breed, ran in hot haste to Ravana and poured into his ears, their tale of the frightful monkey and his work. "Lord of life and death! A monkey has found his way to our *asoka* grove and had secret speech with Sita. Nay, it is there even now. Boundless is his strength, courage and might. We questioned her many a wise about him; but she would tell us nothing. Who knows he may be, despatched here by Indra, Kubera or even by Rama himself to search for his wife? That monkey of wonderful form and feature has reduced to black ruin, our magnificent garden of the harem with its rare trees and birds and beasts. All except the spot, that shelters Sita, may be, he wants to offer her shelter, or may be, he is too tired to do it. But that can never be. It is surely meant to protect her. It did not lay its finger upon this splendid *simsupa* tree under whose leafy shade and flower and fruits she takes her seat. Lord of dread prowess! We pray you to order that the terrible monkey should be dealt with as it deserves. We are sure that he had secret speech with Sita. He has wrought havoc upon our grove. Are you not the lord of countless myriads that one who had speech with the lady of your choice should yet cumber this world?"

The dread lord of Lanka heard them out. His eyes reddened with rage and flame even as a sacrificial hearth, well fed with oblations. Like unto two blazing lights from which drip red hot drops of oil, his infuriated eyes shed streaming tears. He called unto himself, a regiment named *kinkaras,* his peers in strength and valour and ordered; "Go forth and deal with this creature as he deserves."

The eighty-thousand *kinkaras,* mighty and huge, started from the palace armed to the teeth. Of large stomach and tusks, frightful of mien, of matchless strength, ever bent upon war and slaughter, they laid themselves out to catch Maruti alive. They drew near to the heroic monkey that awaited them at the garden gate and rushed at him as moths at a forest fire. They hit him from all sides and at the same time with curiously shaped clubs, iron bars, with shafts of gold, arrows resplendent as the sun, iron pestles, broad swords, tridents, harpoons, rapiers and cutlasses. But the dread son of Vayu blazed in his splendour and effulgence and stood on the ground unshaken like a lofty mountain. He lashed his mighty tail on the earth and roared so that the quarters shrieked with affright. Then he grew larger and larger and roared again like a lion; and Lanka shook to its very roots. The mountains around gave back the echo a thousandfold and denizens of the sky fell down dazed with fear.

Then Maruti turned to the soldiers and cried, "Know ye, the peers of my lord Rama of matchless strength and prowess and of his renowned brother Lakshmana and to His Majesty Sugriva over whom Sri Raghava has cast his shield? I am the humble slave and foot-stool of Raghuvira, who graces the line of Ikshvaku ever intent upon the good of all. They know me as Hanuman. I am the holy terror of my foes. I am the beloved son of the lord Vayu. My weapons are trees and rocks. *Rakshasas* will fall under my hands by thousands and by millions. Your king Ravana may multiply himself a thousand-fold and yet he will be nothing before me. I passed through your fortifications and guards unharmed; I went through this Lanka from end to end; I laid my head at the feet of the lady Sita; I acquainted myself with her whereabouts; and right before your eyes, I will lay this city in ruins; I will accomplish my purpose to the least detail and I will go back safe and happy."

His roars turned the hearts of the *rakshasas* to water; and they shook with fear at the sight of Anjaneya, towering above them to the skies like a huge cloud-bank at sun-set; but the dread commands of Ravana gave them no room to question the necessity of a fight with the creature. So they again struck at him from all sides. And he, hemmed on all sides by those monsters, cast his eyes about and espied an iron bar that lay near the gate. He hit them with it with lightning strokes and terrible. Like unto the bright lord Garuda, coursing through the sky with the huge serpents he had caught, did Hanuman range above their heads brandishing aloft his bar of iron.

Thus did he lay low the *kinkaras,* despatched by Ravana to slay him, and took his stand over the gate watching for any others that might seek battle with him.

Meanwhile, some *rakshasas* were too much afraid to approach Maruti and took themselves in hot haste to Ravana and acquainted him with the sad fate of the *kinkaras*. Thereat the *rakshasa* lord rolled his eyes about and despatched Jambumali, the son of Prahastha his prime minister, and one who knew not defeat.

CHAPTER 43

MARUTI DESTROYS THE CASTLE

MEANWHILE Hanuman said to himself, "I have slain the *kinkaras;* I have ruined the lofty *asoka* grove; but I have not laid low this castle like unto the mansion of gods. This too will I add to the list as an index of my strength.

He took a short leap and stood on the top of the castle, lofty as a peak of mount Meru; and shone in his radiance, even as a sun that faces the old one in his new-born pride and lustre. He grew and grew apace like the huge Pariyatra mountain blazed in his flush of victory and roared like a lion so that Lanka shook to its foundations.

The sound pierced the ears of those that heard it. Birds on high fainted with terror and fell down; and the guards of the castle were bereft of their senses.

And Maruti spoke to them in a voice of thunder. "Know ye, the peers of my lord Raghuvira unmatched as yet in the science of war; Lakshmana of the mighty arms; and of His Majesty Sugriva over whom Sri Rama has thrown his protecting aegis. I am the humble foot-stool of Raghava, the best and bravest of the royal line of Ikshvaku, and the dispenser of good to all beings; I am known to my friends as Hanuman. I am the beloved son of the lord Vayu. I am Death to my foes. Hundreds and thousands of *rakshasas* fall before my missiles of rocks and trees; a thousand

Ravanas put together count as nothing before me. I have penetrated to the depths of this Lanka, so jealously guarded by you; I have, unknown to you and unseen by you, had leisurely speech with the lady Sita; right before your wondering eyes will I lay this city in ruins, and, my purpose accomplished, will I go back to my master.'' Thus did he roar out fearfully to the inmates of the castle, from its lofty height.

Thereat, the guards rushed at him, with weapons strange and deadly and hit him from all sides. Like a huge eddy in the current of Ganga's flood, did that *rakshasa*-host whirl round and round Maruti. Then it came to the monkey-warrior, that it was a pitiful job to waste his time on this child's play with the guards. So, he was overcome with wrath and loomed huge and frightful before their eyes. He uprooted a mighty pillar that supported the castle roof; and like the lord of the *devas* whirling his dread thunderbolt to slay his *asura* foes, he whirled it aloft and brought it down with a mighty force upon the other pillars that bore the edifice. And they, in their turn, caught fire and shone with their golden designs so curiously in wrought and in the twinkling of an eye, the castle was one huge heap of ashes. Then Anjaneya made short work of the *rakshasa*-broods; Indra's *vajra* was not quicker. He poised himself over its head and roared out that all might hear of him. ''Our Majesty Sugriva has despatched myriads of monkey-warriors all over the world to bring him back, news of the whereabouts of the lady Sita. Like my humble self, they are matchless of strength and courage; they never fail in any mission that they are sent upon. Some are endowed with the strength of ten elephants, some of a hundred, some of a thousand, some of an *ogha* (a huge figure). Some compare proudly with my lord Vayu in strength and speed; while as to others no description is possible. You are marked out as doomed to destruction by His Majesty Sugriva, the ruler of the lives and destinies of myriads of monkey-hosts whose weapons are but their teeth and nails. You have brought down upon yourself the wrath of Raghuvira; you have invited his enmity; and do you dare hope, that Lanka will survive it? And you too but precede it by a bit. And your lord and ruler Ravana but leads you on as ever.''

CHAPTER 44

THE DEATH OF JAMBUMALI

MEANWHILE Jambumali, the son of Prahastha was despatched by Ravana and started on his mission armed at all points. Tusked with a wild boar or elephant, decked in garlands and garments of fiery red, his ear-rings and chains flashing in the sun, he moved apace like a huge mountain rolling his eyes frightfully with his bow, like unto a huge rainbow. And with his deadly arrows he stringed and twang well upon the ears like the bolt of Indra or a clap of thunder. The quarters and the ends of the earth and the sky above quaked in affright. He came apace in his car drawn by huge asses. Maruti guessed that he might give him some minutes' work to gladden his heart. His roars drew the eyes of the *rakshasas* to where he sat above the gate; and he, stopping the course, struck at his face with a half-moon dart; and at his head with a *karni* and at his mighty arms with ten *narachas (karni is* shaped like an elephant goad). Maruti's face shone thereupon like a blown lotus kissed by the rays of the morning sun. The blood drops over it resembled the drops of fine sandal paste sprinkled over the flower.

It, but roused the latent wrath in Hanuman; he bethought himself of the shortest way, to slay the *rakshasas*. He glanced around him and his eyes fell upon a huge piece of rock. Maruti, the mightiest of the mighty, uprooted it and hit Jambumali with it. His foe shattered it with ten sharp shafts; Hanuman like unto a tornado in speed, found himself foiled in his purpose, grasped a huge tree that stood by and whirled it round his head. But the *rakshasa* sent from his bow, sharp arrows that broke it to bits. He followed with another five that pierced him in his shoulders. A fresh dart struck him on the chest; and ten more came on its heels right between his breasts.

That redoubtable champion of the monkeys was hit all over by his enemy's shafts that brizzled up like a porcupine. His wrath grew darker yet; he grasped the huge iron bar that served him so well a while ago, and whirled it around his head. Boundless of strength, matchless of speed, he swung it with his full force and struck Jambumali on his broad huge chest with it. Thereafter, no one knew what became of the *rakshasa*. His head, arms or knees, or bow or arrows, or car, or horses — nothing was there to see. Thus the huge giant Jambumali fell under the blow of Anjaneya and was literally shattered to atoms.

News was brought to the lord Ravana of the destruction of the mighty *kinkaras* and the death of Jambumali. His eyes blazed red with rage and he roared an order to the sons of his ministers, seven in number and matchless of might. "Drag me here that mischievous monkey in bonds."

CHAPTER 45

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE MINISTER'S SONS

THOSE seven sons of the ministers, blazing like fire in their splendour started from the hall of audience with the commands of their lord Ravana on their heads and eyes. Boundless of strength, the best and most skilfull of those that excelled in the art of war, filled with the spirit of emulation, of tried valour, they started on their dread mission surrounded by myriads of valiant soldiers. Their cars gay with flags and banners and filled with windows wrought of gold, thundered on like huge cloud-banks. They twanged their bows, curiously inlaid with molten gold. They looked at a distance like rain-clouds through which played the gay and bright lightning flashes, as they marched on, expecting an easy walk-over, with such an insignificant foe. But their mothers, kith and kin and friends were heavy with glow and despair; for, the news reached them that the mighty *kinkaras* themselves fell beneath the consuming rage of the wonderful monkey.

Not so, those sons of ministers who drew near Hanuman as he sat over the gate. They tried every one of them to forge ahead of the others and be the first to take the creature alive. They poured a ceaseless stream of arrows, even like rain-clouds; and with their huge cars rolling with the noise of thunder, they hemmed in Anjaneya around.

But, he towered over them like a huge mountain with cataracts and waterfalls and cascades, for, he was literally coated with the darts of his opponents. In the blue sky and clear overhead, he coursed with matchless speed of the flying cars, like unto the lord Vayu disporting himself in his elements, in the midst of clouds decked with rain-bows. Maruti played with them for a while in the sky as he took note of their strength and weakness.

Then he gave a frightful roar that turned the hearts of the *rakshasa*-hosts to water and swooped down in their midst with lightning speed. Some fell under the blows of his adamant palms; some were kicked to death; some were reduced to dust by his mighty fists; some were torn to ribbons; some crashed down lifeless with the impact of his huge chest; some he squeezed to death between his thighs; and others fell in a death faint, their hearts broken by his lionlike roars.

Thus did those sons of ministers meet their fate; at the sight of which, their followers were seized with panic and hid themselves wherever they could. Elephants trumpeted harshly, horses fell down where they stood as if struck with lightning; the earth was hid under the cars that now lay broken to bits, their flags banners, pennons and umbrellas, a shapeless mass of ruin; the brooks, the streams and the other water-courses around, ran blood; and the vast city of Lanka resounded with strange and unpleasant cries of agony and terror.

In this wise, did Maruti destroy that renowned *rakshasa*-hosts 'Rejoicing in his boundless strength and matchless might', he waited over the gate for other *rakshasa* heroes to give him a chance to breath himself.

CHAPTER 46

THE SLAYING OF THE FIVE GENERALS

RAVANA listened to the news of the destruction of the sons of the ministers by Anjaneya. He carefully kept within himself his growing fear of Maruti whom he regarded so lightly as an ordinary monkey. Yet he did not lose heart; but devised other plans. Virupaksha, Yupakaha, Durdhara, Praghasa and Bhasakarna, were five of his generals and the best. He sent for them and laid his command on them to bring him alive, the troublesome monkey. Mighty warriors were they and war-worn veterans. Their speed and onrush in battle was something like that of the Lord of air. And to them did Ravana address himself.

"Leaders of my hosts! Take with you countless regiments, man, horse, elephant and chariot. Deal with that monkey even as I tell you. Draw near him very very cautiously. Put a stop to the pranks of the creature, whose acts are not innocent with play sometime. I have bestowed careful thought on him and his methods; and I decide that it is no monkey at all. Indra or some other enemy of mine has created this being of frightful valour to do evil to us. Time and oft have we put to rout the embattled hosts of *nagas, yakshas, gandharvas, devas, asuras* and *maharshis*. So it is no wonder that they lie in wait to do us harm. Manage somehow to bring me the animal alive. Be not guilty of the mistake of slighting that monkey as an ordinary thing; for, its intelligence and valour is simply boundless. Full well do I know Vali, Sugriva, Jambhavan, the mighty Nila, the generalissimo and Dvivida and other monkeys of renown. Verily they are valiant heroes; but their course, their lustre, their valour, intelligence, spirit, perseverence and enthusiasm were never like this. This huge creature can take forms at will. Now, know I not that Indra, the *devas,* the *asuras,* men and all these creatures in the three worlds, may bend themselves together against you, but to be consumed with the flames of your wrath. However, victory and defeat is often uncertain. He who sets his heart upon worsting his foes in battle should ground himself well in the signs of polity and guard himself most carefully."

Those *rakshasa*-heroes, blazing like fire in their lustre laid their king's commands to their hearts; and they started to the *asoka* grove armed to the teeth with frightful weapons, followed by cars, huge elephants and horses fleet as wind. They caught sight of Anjaneya as he sat over the gate, crowned like the rising sun with the halo of his lustre. He had yet to meet his equal in strength, speed, stature, intelligence, spirit or enthusiasm. The *rakshasas* sprang at him from all sides, their frightful weapons raised aloft to strike.

Durdhara hit him on the head with five shafts bright as the black lily. They were wrought of iron, frightful, green of hue and meant to rive the hearts of the foes. Maruti roared so that the quarters shrieked back in affright and sprang up in the sky. Then Durdhara poured at him a ceaseless torrent of arrows from where he sat in his car. Like unto a strong wind scattering rain-clouds at the end of winter, Maruti stopped the course and speed of Durdhara. Then he noted, that the *rakshasa* gave him too much trouble. He grew and grew and with lightning speed, crashed down from untold height upon his car, even as an army of thunderbolts crashed down upon a huge mountain.

It was reduced to powder, yoke, axle and all. The eight horses were crushed to death; and Durdhara lay by their side on the earth a frightful corpse.

Thereat, Yupaksha and Virupaksha who were strangers to defeat, were beside themselves with wrath and sprang at Maruti, striking at his broad chest with huge iron pestles. Anjaneya like unto the lord Garuda in valour stopped them on their way. He jumped down to the earth and uprooting a huge tree, struck to death the two *rakshasa*-heroes.

Then Praghasa, with a huge broad sword and Basakarna with a sharp trident rushed at Maruti and gave him battle. His body was hit all over by their weapons; his tawny hair was clotted all over with his blood and he shone in his growing wrath, like the morning sun. Then he lightly tore up a mountain peak with its trees and beasts and birds and battered to death the two generals and their followers. He dashed horses against horses, elephants against elephants, soldiers against soldiers, cars against cars, and made short work of the vast army even as Indra deals destruction to the *asuras*. That battle-field was rendered impassable by crushed elephants, horses and *rakshasas* and by broken cars.

Thus did Maruti deal death to the five generals and their countless armies. Then he breathed himself for a space as he took his seat over the gate awaiting further foes, like unto the God of Death on the Day of Doom.

CHAPTER 47

DEATH OF AKSHA, THE SON OF RAVANA

RAVANA listened to the news of his five renowned generals and the seven sons of his ministers and their armies destroyed by a single monkey. He turned his eyes upon those that stood around him to decide whom he should send next; when, his son Aksha lifted his head all eager to give battle to Maruti and bring him alive. Thereat Ravana signed to him to go.

Aksha left the hall of audience. Famous among famous *rakshasa*-warriors, he shone with radiance even as the sacrificial fire fed with oblations by wise Brahmanas. He started on his mission brandishing aloft a lance inlaid with gold. He directed his huge car fashioned of molten gold to where Anjaneya sat. That car was the gift of hard-won *tapas* to Aksha who rivalled in prowess the very gods on high. Its windows were wrought of fine gold. Flags, banners and pennons decked with gems waved aloft over it. Eight steeds of the speed of thought bore it along gaily. Gods and *asuras* dared not bar his way. It moved of its own accord and needed no one to direct it. Like unto the blazing sun in its splendour it held its course unchecked through the sky. Quivers, eight swords, *saktis, tomaras* and other curious weapons graced its side in faultless array. Aksha cast his eyes proudly in his car, provisioned with every article of war, the bridles of the horses of the hue of the sun, the moon, yellow and white; it seemed to him as if a new sun dawned in the sky. The earth and the heavens, the mountains and the seas trembled with the thud of horses, elephants, chariots and others. And Aksha drew near Hanuman who was eagerly watching to give battle to the next- comer.

The tawny-eyed *rakshasa* met his foe, the son of the lord Vayu, blazing like the Fire of destruction, on the last day of the worlds. Said he to himself, "Wonder of wonders! This monkey, alone and unaided, has entered our capital, dealt destruction to all these armies of ours lightly; and now, how listlessly it lies reclined over the gate?" He began to regard Maruti more closely and with increasing respect. Now Aksha was no fool, nor weakling. He noted carefully the huge stature, strength and prowess of his opponent as evidenced by his wondrous feats; he compared it with his own strength and valour; he was confident that he would get the better of him; and his fearful lustre grew apace like the sun that had left behind him the dull bands of clouds.

Then he resolved to give battle to Maruti; he knew full well that there was none who could stand before the valour of the monkey; so, blazing in his wrath as he was, yet, he held himself in restraint and proceeded on his task cautiously and calmly. He hit Anjaneya at first with three keen shafts. He found that they affected him not in the least; the monkey fought on as if nothing troubled him. It was bursting with pride and haughtiness as the certain victory that was to follow. Aksha said to himself : "Now have I found a foeman worthy of my steel." Right gladly did he grasp his bow and arrows, regarded his opponent very carefully and drew near him again in all the glory of his garments, garlands and bright ear-rings.

Then, there followed a battle between the two that turned the hearts of the *devas* and the *asuras* to water; and, it is not easy to find a parallel to it. The earth quaked in affright; the sun hid himself in abject terror; the air stood still; huge mountains shook to their bases; the sky overhead, was torn with an indescribable roar; and the seas were troubled to their depths. Aksha was a warrior of warriors; he was an adept in the art of aiming his arrows at impossible marks with frightful precision. He sent right at the head of Hanuman, three shafts inlaid with gold banks, decked with gay feathers, sharp as needles and like unto mighty serpents of cruel venom. The monkey-hero was drenched in a moment with his own blood that flowed in torrents. He rolled his eyes frightfully in his anger; he grew red in face like unto the morning sun; the shafts stood out from his head like a radiant halo of glory. But, joy and the fire of battle filled his heart when he beheld the very son of Ravana come to give him fight with bow and arrows and other frighful weapons upraised. The Lord of Day enthroned on the heights of Mount Mandara at midnoon in the northern half of the year and burning to cinders, the creatures upon the luckless earth, shone not more intensely than Hanuman in the full plenitude of strength, valour and wrath. The sparks that flew from his eyes burnt as it were to nothing, the cars and troops of Aksha. But, the *rakshasa* glowed with his bow as if he was a huge cloud-bank, irradiated with a rainbow. He poured a ceaseless torrent of arrows at the rock which Hanuman resembled.

Now, Maruti was no eaglet, essaying its first flight; like unto a huge storm was his valour and might. He noticed that Aksha was unshaken in fight and utterly confident; and that his valour and lustre grew every moment. And he roared with joy at the prospect of the terrible fight that was to follow. Like unto deep ruined wells in the woods entirely hid under the grass that grew over it, luring mad elephants to destruction in their depths, Aksha was bursting with the pride of youth; he owned no equal to him in fight; his eyes grew redder with wrath; and thus he closed with Anjaneya. He hid him under a cloud of arrows. But Maruti roared like a cloud at him. He slapped his shoulders and thighs frightfully and sprang into the sky. Immediately the *rakshasa* followed him even there with his car and covered him with arrows, even as a rain-cloud emptying its contents upon a huge mountain. Maruti of the speed of thought was ready for it; his wrath grew and he lightly evaded them and like the wind he coursed through the sky in the narrow interstices of the shafts. He observed that Aksha bent his mighty bow and hid the sky from view, through his arrows discharged with terrible energy. He gave him his meed of praise and said to himself, "Now let me think out a plan to defeat this foe who fights so cleverly and so skilfully".

Then the *rakshasa* pierced him deep between the shoulders and it drew a thundrous roar from him. A past master in the mysteries of war and fight, he bestowed some thought on the youth and his valour. "This night-ranger shining in his splendour even as the morning sun, seems to me of no mean prowess. A youth in years, yet he lays to his record wonderful feats that grown veterans dare not dream of. There is not one kind of fight he knows not; and he applies them right well. Verily, it goes against my heart to slay this poor boy. Most courageous and confident, his valour is something to be remembered. The very gods and the great sages cannot fail to admire this *rakshasa's* mastery of the art of war. Now his spirit and energy grows apace. No tremour clouds his heart as he faces me most boldly and invites me to mortal combat. My radiance dims not his keen eyes. The hearts of the gods and *asuras* cannot but tremble with fear at the valour of this youth, endowed with the speed of thought. It is a wonder how his energy and spirit grow every minute. How can I get the better of him if I deal with him in a spirit of carelessness. So, there is no other go for me but to slay this poor boy. No one can afford to ignore a fire that grows and grows every moment."

Thus did he read aright the strength and might of his foe; he decided within himself the course he was to adopt; and he set his heart upon the death of the *rakshasa*. Eight horses were yoked to his car. Strong, fleet as the wind, trained to various evolutions, they bore the huge car so lightly. Maruti decided to deprive the youth of his car as a first step. Stationing himself overhead in the sky, he killed them with frightful blows of his hands. The once beautiful car fell to the earth a shapeless mass, its axles broken to bits, the flags torn to pieces and the horses a thing of the past. Then Aksha the most redoubtable of warriors leapt lightly from it and sprang into the sky with his bow and sword. He gave one the idea of a sage who lays by his house of flesh and through the power of *yoga* makes his way to the worlds of gods in his form of light. The son of Vayu endowed with the prowess of his father ranged in the sky that was the home of his parent and of the lord Garuda. Without the slightest shadow of fear troubling his heart, did his foe rush at him. Maruti watched his opportunity, drew near him and grasping at his feet whirled him round and round with frightful speed even as Garuda plays with his serpents; and dashed him against the earth and ground him to atoms as it were. He cast down the shapeless ball of flesh. Arms, shoulders, thighs, loins, neck — all were shattered to bits; the joints were broken; and blood flowed in torrents from the huge carcass. And thus did Aksha, the beloved son of Ravana breath his last on the bosom of Mother earth.

Thus did Hanuman break him to pieces and grind him to dust; and thus he caused the proud heart of Ravana to know trouble and grief. The great sages, planetary rulers, the holy men of stern vows, the *bhutas, yakshas, pannagas,* the gods and their ruler the lord Indra, stood in speechless wonder as they gazed at Anjaneya with eyes that forgot to wink.

Aksha with eyes red as blood and radiant even as Jayanta, the son of Indra, was thus laid low by Maruti who with unabated enthusiasm and energy took his place over the gate like unto the Lord of Death ruling over the Day of Dissolution.

CHAPTER 48

MARUTI IN THE BONDS OF BRAHMASTRA

NEWS was brought to Ravana of the death of his son Aksha at the hands of Maruti. He was almost demented with grief; he showed it not and mustered up all his courage. He turned to his eldest son Indrajit, equal in valour to the Lord of the *devas* himself and roared out his orders in thundering wrath. "My dear boy! You know best the mysteries of the weapon of Brahma. You stand above all in your knowledge of the secrets of the art of war. *Devas* and *asuras* cry out in pitiable helplessness at the very mention of your name. The worlds yet echo the fame you won when you drove before you like a flock of frightened sheep, the *devas* and Indra to lead them. You have found a way to the heart of the Lord Brahma and he has initiated you in the science of weapons of every kind. I have seen that the *asuras* and *deva* hosts with Indra at their head cannot for a moment stand before the consuming fire of your missiles. The three worlds with their teeming population, Vishnu, Siva, be it the highest among them, did not face you in battle; but paid very heavily for their temerity. I cannot place beside you any one who, while defending himself with the might of his arms and the marvellous powers won by hard *tapas,* yet stands unrivalled in keenness of intellect and perfect knowledge of the fitness of time and place. There is nothing beyond the reach of your valour in battle. There is nothing that your subtle brain cannot compass in the range of the plans, the schemes and the resources of war. The creatures high and low in the three worlds have felt but too well the power of your arms and of your weapons. Except myself, you have not met your peer in valour and the might born of *tapas* and marvellous weapons. So my heart is free from anxiety at the thought of certain victory, when I send you forth to give battle. My *kinkaras,* Jambumali, the valiant sons of ministers, the five generals and their armies and, last but not the least, your dear brother Aksha met with destruction at the hands of puny monkey; but the confidence and thrust I have in you is something apart and entirely above that which I placed in them.

What! A monkey single-handed, with none to assist him, has penetrated fearlessly into our Lanka guarded so carefully. It has made short work of so many heroes and veterans in war. So take full note of this and of his keen intellect, of his boundless strength, might and valour. Take count also, of your prowess and might. Put up speed and energy consonant to your strength. I know none that shares with you, your knowledge of the secrets of weapons. I cannot lay my finger on any one that opposed you in battle, and lived to speak of it. Take heed of your might and the might of your foe, that your armies might not be destroyed when they approached the monkey. Begin the battle in such a way that you might come out through it, best. Mightiest of warriors! Think not to defeat your foe by massing up countless battalions against him. It is nothing to him to destroy them before the eye has time to wink. Seek not to kill him with the mighty *vajra;* for, it is nothing before his strength. I think that the lord Vayu himself must only take a second place to him in speed. Of what avail is your *vajra,* against one, who darts upon you from any quarter all of a sudden and kills you before you know of it. Do not try to knock him down dead with your fists, when he draws near; for, your fists are utterly powerless against the Fire of Universal Destruction. So, take careful note of what I have been telling you and think out a sound plan of battle. You should accomplish your purpose; concentrate all your energies upon the point before you; meditate as you go, upon the spells that speed the divine weapons that you have mastered. Well, come back victorious at any cost. Once more, I tell you that it is possible to bind him powerless with the might of divine weapons; and no other means, will avail. You may ask me, "Is it not better if you yourself go upon this task instead of trying the strength and prowess,of a boy like myself upon such a dreadful enemy." Now, it is not consonant with the rules of kingly polity that a monarch should himself go upon a guest until he has exhausted all the resources of his generals and armies at command. And it ill beseems me who is their warmest exponent. Further, do I not know, that I have to find one yet, who rivals you, in the use of weapons of every kind in battle? Again, it behoves us to gain victory and fame by meeting worthy foes in battle and laying them low. It is folly to let go such a golden opportunity; and it is why I am sending you forth."

Now Indrajit, endowed with the valour and prowess of the very gods themselves, was no mean warrior. A hero of heroes; he drank with eager ears the words of Ravana and all afire to meet his foe, he went round his father, in profound reverence to take leave of him. His kith and kin and friends rent the air with shouts of joy and praise. And he went forth to battle single-minded and burning with enthusiasm, the first born of the Lord of Lanka, famed through the worlds; with eyes lovely as the petals of the lotus; of blinding lustre, blazing with the spirit of undaunted courage; like unto the huge ocean towering towards the sky with its mountainous billows at the fortnightly conjunctions; he left the hall of audience with leonine roars of joy. Indrajit, like unto Indra whom he worsted, drove a car borne by four lions. They were fleet even as the Lord Garuda, perfectly matched with sharp white teeth; they drew lightly the car which held its course unimpeded above and below. Indrajit, the best and the bravest of bowmen, matchless in his knowledge of weapons and magic missiles, drove on in his splendid car to where Hanuman awaited him.

Maruti caught from afar the rolling of the chariot and the twang of the bow; and his heart danced with joy at the thought of meeting a foeman worthy of his steel. Meanwhile the son of Ravana, unequalled in all the secrets of war, approached Anjaneya, his huge bow upraised and his sharp shafts fitted with steel points, ready to shoot.

And while he drew near, the *rakshasa*-hero armed at all points and blazing with enthusiasm and energy, the earth and the quarters shook in affright; the beasts howled and screamed most dreadfully. And hosts of *nagas, yakshas, siddhas, maharshis,* planetary rulers, star Regents, stood ranged along the sky to behold that most wonderful fight. Birds of prey screamed with joy at the prospect of a sumptuous feast. Maruti cast a careful look on Indrajit that drew towards him in his car; he gave out a lion's roar and grew in stature. Indrajit bent his bow and stung it shivering the quarters with the thundrous twangs. Then Anjaneya and Indrajit set themselves in right earnest to their task like the eternal enemies of each other, the gods and the *asuras;* for, they were terrible of speed in movement and action, mighty beyond count and perfectly clear-headed and confident in every phase of war.

The son of Ravana, was of immortal renown as the best of bowmen; he was a *maharatha* (the greatest car warrior) valiant and intensely eager for a chance of battle. Maruti brushed away his cruel shafts and coursed through the sky increasing stature at every minute. Then that *rakshasa* lord let loose at him, crooked darts decked with gold bands and gay feathers. They were long, sharp as razors and fell upon the foes like the thunderbolt of Indra with deadly effect. The mingled roar of war drums, tom toms, the rolling of the chariot wheels, the twang of the dreadful bows, and the confused noise of the armies fell upon the ears of Anjaneya. He rose yet higher and kept away from him the arrows shot by that best of bowmen and made his way through them while gradually increasing his strength and spirit. When the *rakshasa* discharged the arrows at him, the monkey-lord stretched his hands and put them away and sprang aloft. They were of matchless speed, expert fighters and all creatures stood in dumb amaze at the fight that they put forth.

Indrajit failed to make out what his foe had at his heart; and Maruti was equally at sea about his foeman's innate purpose. Both were endowed with godlike might; and the battle between them was such as none could behold and live. Indrajit was of wondrous intelligence. He aimed straight and struck through and put his whole heart in his work. "All my shafts go straight and unerring and find a place in the body of this foe. But I cannot make out how he manages to go through them unscathed. This is most wonderful." He bestowed long and careful thought over the matter. "Well arrows, shafts and darts are utterly out of place against him. It only remains for me to strike him unconscious and take him in bonds." Then Indrajit who knew well the science and art of weapons, divine and infernal, said to himself, "He is perfectly immune from weapons of any kind. It may be that the *astra* (magical weapon of Brahma) will render him powerless". So he discharged it at Maruti and bound him speechless. All at once the monkey-lord dropped to the earth speechless, limp and in a dead faint. It took him some little time to recover and bring back to memory that he was in the bonds of the magical weapon of Brahma, that his speed and energy were constrained by it, and that he had a boon granted to him of yore by the Lord of Creation. "I know of no other weapon, that can bind me powerless, unless it be, the one that is dedicated to Brahma. For some time at least I cannot free myself from it. This cunning *rakshasa* knows the secret and hence has chosen this method to render me powerless. It is my bounden duty to submit to the law laid upon me by the Great Teacher of the worlds, the four-faced Brahma. Verily, this weapon is of boundless might. But I hold a boon from the Creator that no harm or inconvenience of any kind will result to me from this weapon of his and that only for a period of a *muhurta* should I be subject to the influence of it. Hence the time of my release is at hand. Brahma, Indra, Vayu and the other great gods have thrown their shields over me; and I fear nothing though I be bound by this most powerful of weapons. Though these *rakshasas* take me in bonds, it but serves my purpose. For, I would have speech with Ravana, note most carefully his strength, valour might and characteristic qualities." And he lay motionless.

Then the *rakshasas* drew near and bound him hard with cords, ropes and barks of trees. Now Maruti was a far-seeing thinker; he decided within himself most thoroughly the plan of action he should take; and it was but a child's play for him to deal with enemies of every description. He feigned unconsciousness and great fear. "May be that Ravana would like to have a look at me." That was why he never resisted the efforts of the *rakshasas* to bind and worry him. But alas! the earthly bonds undid in a moment the magic influence of the weapon of Brahma. For, it brooks not rival of any kind in its work.

Now Indrajit, most keen of insight, knew at once that Maruti was absolutely free, the moment that he was bound with ropes; and cried in impotent grief and anger. "Alas! these fools are blissfully ignorant of the fact that the *Brahmastra* is powerless if associated with any other of a lower kind. They have sadly undone my work; they have cruelly deprived me of my mightiest weapon. And most unfortunate of all, I am prevented from using any other weapon against the enemy, once that I have shot at him with the *astra* of Brahma. It took me no end of hard thought and trouble to bring about this most wonderful result; and here I have only this bitter disappointment to reward my pains. Nor can I discharge the *Brahmastra* twice. This most cunning of my foes pretends that he is under the influence of the weapon though absolutely beyond its power. I do not fathom his purpose. May be, he will spring up all at once and deal death around." And he sank into a fit of gloom and anxiety.

But Hanuman showed not in the least that he was free from the power of the *Brahmastra;* and bore most calmly the bonds of the *rakshasas* and their cruel blows with clubs and fists. Then they dragged him along to the palace of Ravana. And Indrajit pointed him out to the king and his ministers and said, "Behold the mighty monkey that destroyed our *asoka* grove and slew our generals and their armies. But he knew full well that though immune from the *Brahmastra,* he yet pretended to be under its influence, for some ulterior purpose of his. The *rakshasas* informed their Lord of the presence of the monkey who lay there in bonds like an elephant, in a faint. The people there gazed with awe and wonder at him and cried, "Who is he? Whom does he serve? Where does he come from? What is his purpose here? Are there any among us to befriend him?"

Then a wave of anger passed over their hearts and they roared at him "Kill him, burn him at the stake, cut him to pieces, torture him most frightfully this wicked wretch of a monkey that had put an eternal insult upon us by slaying our friends, our kith and kin." But Maruti heard it all unmoved and passed through the streets until he came to where Ravana sat in audience, his aged ministers ranged around his seat in the gem-encrusted hall.

And the Lord of Lanka cast his eyes most wonderingly for the first time upon the monkey-warrior blazing in his energy, dragged here and there by the hideous *rakshasas*. Anjaneya, on his part returned his look fearlessly as if to challenge him to do his worst. Dasagriva was endowed with boundless strength and lustre and shone with the radiance of the Lord of Day on his throne in the mid sky, in all the glory of his rays.

Then the *rakshasa*-lord rolled his blood-shot eyes most fearfully in ever-growing wrath at Maruti and turning to the ministers at his feet grown grey with age and wisdom, issued a command. "Acquaint yourselves with the details about this monkey." Accordingly they said to Maruti "Who are you? What is your object in coming here? What purpose did you set yourself to carry out here?" Then Anjaneya spoke back in reply, "I am the humble emissary of my lord Sugriva, who sent me on here."

CHAPTER 49

RAVANA

MARUTI who penetrated into Lanka all fearlessly and made his foes tremble before him, said to himself in surprise and wonder "Ha! Ha! Most strange! I guessed that if I despatched to the realms of Death the *rakshasa*-heroes one by one, Ravana must come to me at some time or other; and then I will gauge his strength and might. But now my carefully laid plans have gone astray. He has, without stirring from his throne brought me to him." Then the memory came to him of his great crime towards Rama and the cruel agony to which he subjected the lady Sita. He was beside himself with rage and darted a piercing look at him.

A golden crown, encrusted with every variety of rare and priceless gems shone on his head, decked with strings of pearl. Ornaments of curious and wonderful pattern set with rare gems and precious stones flashed all over his body, as if the creation of the fancy of an artist in his olden hours, Garments of silk, snowy white, covered his limbs; perfumes and pastes of civet, musk, sandal, aloes of diverse designs were skilfully painted over his mighty chest and arms. He was gazing intently at Anjaneya and most frightfully with his rolling eyes, blood-red, twice ten in number. His cruel tusks gleamed through his hanging lips. His ten heads gave one the idea of the lofty Mandara, with its cloud-capped peaks, haunted by beasts of prey. His complexion resembled that of a hill of black paint. His broad chest was adorned with a rope of pearls whose pendent blazed like the moon in its full, even as a dark cloud-bank across which lines of cranes take their flight. Garlands, necklets and armlets lay gracefully over his shoulders and arms, while rare sandal pastes were painted upon them most skilfully. His arms were long, hard, stout and muscular and resembled huge serpents of the five-headed variety.

His seat was fashioned of pure spotless crystal and ornamented with slender fine pillars of flashing gems and priceless carpets and rugs. Maidens of ravishing beauty stood around it in all the splendour of their garments and finery, waving fans and chowries over him. Durdhara, Prahastha, Mahaparsva and Nikumba, his four ministers sat round him as if he was the broad earth girdled by the four mighty oceans. They were adepts in counsels of state. Proud of their matchless strength and valour, they ever sought the highest welfare of Ravana; and other ministers were ranged around him even as the gods serve and wait upon Indra. His splendour and lustre blinded the eyes of the beholders, as he sat on his throne in the pride of his strength and power, even as he were a dark cloud-bank resting on the top of mount Meru watered by a thousand cataracts. Maruti beheld the world-famed lord of Lanka and too much absorbed and surprised to feel the worry of the *rakshasas* around him. The sheen of the ten-headed ruler of the *rakshasa*-world confused him somewhat and he cried, "What a mighty stature and strength and spirit to correspond! What undaunted courage! What resistless energy! What a blinding effulgence! I am forced to confess that there are no bounds to his radiance and prowess. He is endowed with every perfection and excellence that could be desired. Alas! If but this wondrous being strayed not from the path of right, Indra and this world could find no more capable protector. Now his cruelties and bespeakable deeds make the gods, the *asuras* and the worlds tremble. If ever this *rakshasa* lets himself loose in wrath he would consume this world and cast it on the waters of the oceans."

CHAPTER 50

RAVANA AND MARUTI

THE mighty Ravana, whose name turned the hearts of all beings to water, beheld the tawny-eyed Anjaneya stand before him in his blinding lustre; a wave of wrath passed over him and he cried, "Who might this be? Is it the lord Nandi come to me in this guise, he, who, when of yore I uprooted the huge Kailasa mountain, cast a dreadful curse upon me? Or is it the *asura* Bana come to me in this shape?"

Then he turned to Prahastha and spoke to him in words suited to the time and place and pregnant with deep meanings, "Who is he, this wicked wretch? Where has he come from? Who has sent him here? Why did he shatter our *asoka* garden and frighten our *rakshasas?* Know it of him. Why has he dared to penetrate into my capital that none dreams of approaching? Why has he fought with my armies? Let us have his answer." Then Prahastha, "Monkey! fear not; pick up a bit of courage and speak straight. May all good ever go with you. Speak true if Indra had sent you here. Again I say to you, fear not; I will see that you are set free. Speak true even though it be Kubera, Yama, Varuna or Vishnu, who, intent upon defeating our lord and master, have despatched you here in this shape. I know that you are a monkey-warrior by your appearance; but one cannot make the mistake of deciding so, should he but notice your wondrous strength and splendour. Speak straight and you will be free. Speak crooked and you have bade adieu to life. How did you manage to find your way into the royal harem. Speak. What did you seek there?"

Then Anjaneya turned to Ravana, heeding not the minister that spoke to him and replied "Indra, Yama, Varuna, none of these are my masters. I have no acquaintance with Kubera. The lord Vishnu has not sent me here. I am a monkey. This is my real shape. I came here to have an interview with the lord of the *rakshasas*. I destroyed the *asoka* garden to secure that end. The *rakshasas* came to do battle with me thereupon. I fought with them in pure self-defence. The gods, the *asuras* and the weapons, divine and infernal bind me not; for such is the boon I hold from Brahma. But I submitted to be bounded by the Brahmastra only to have an audience with you. I was free from it later on; but feigned as if I were not, and bore patiently the insults and worries of these *rakshasas*. I have come to you on an affair of state. Raghuvira of boundless lustre has despatched me here. Lord of Lanka! It behoves you to listen to the well-meant words of counsel that I bear to you".

CHAPTER 51

MARUTI COUNSELS RAVANA

EVEN so, spoke Maruti in words pregnant with deep meaning. In the glory of his matchless strength and prowess, he heeded not Ravana, at whose name the worlds tremble in affright; he bestowed no thought upon the fact that he was single and lonely in the midst of millions of cruel *rakshasas;* he knew that his words would infuriate the lord of Lanka and yet, no thought of fear clouded his heart.

"Ruler of Lanka! His Majesty Sugriva, who holds sway over the monkey-world from his throne at Kishkindha, has sent me to you. He regards you as a loving brother and makes kind enquiries of your welfare. The message he has sent you through me are consonant with your good here and hereafter, for he who speaks of them is a great soul and your brother as it were. They are consonant with the great aims, righteousness and wealth. So I pray you to pay careful heed to them.

There lived on this earth a king famed through the worlds as Dasaratha. His armies have not been yet matched in renown or valour. Like unto Indra himself in splendour, he was a father to his subjects. His first born, the lord Rama is endowed with matchless radiance and strength. He is the source of joy to all beings. He holds in his hands the keys of reward and punishment. He followed in the footsteps of the good and at the command of his father came away from his kingdom to live in the forests of Dandaka accompanied by his brother Lakshmana and his wife the lady Sita. That paragon of wifely excellence was spirited away from them most cruelly. I did not tell you that she is the daughter of the great soul Janaka, the ruler of the Videhas.

Then the brothers came to the mount Risyamuka in their search for her and secured the friendship and alliance of our majesty Sugriva. My king passed his word to Sri Rama to search for Sita and bring him news of her and on his part he swore to place Sugriva on the throne of the monkey-world. Accordingly he slew Vali in battle and gave his crown to Sugriva. Vali is no stranger to you; and that foremost of heroes, fell before a single shaft of Rama. Next Sugriva, true to his word, set about to search for the lady Sita and despatched his monkey-hosts in all directions. They course unimpeded on the earth, through the sky and along the underworlds and make careful search for her. Some of them rival the lord Garuda in speed; some take after the lord Vayu; so there is nothing that could bar their resistless might anywhere.

Now, they call me Hanuman; I am the beloved son of the lord Vayu. I took a flying leap across this hundred *yojanas* of watery waste to have a sight of the lady Sita. In my close search through the city, I came upon her in your palace.

The worlds know you as one of mighty intellect; the *Vedas*, the *sastras* and the aims of life hold no secret for you; boons, rare and wonderful, have you won through hard-earned *tapas*. So it ill-becomes you to desire the wives of others and carry them away by force. Persons of keen and far-seeing intelligence like yourself will never entangle themselves in the meshes of such acts as are dissonant to righteousness and are productive of great dangers, while they lay the axe at the root of one's well-being here and hereafter. Should Sri Rama take it into his head to order Lakshmana and should he set about to bend his mighty bow and let loose his shafts pregnant with consuming wrath, the gods and the *asuras,* none of them dare stand before them. The worlds hold not any one who incurred the anger of Raghuvira by offending him and lived to speak of it. So I pray you lay these counsels to your heart, productive of the utmost good to you in the past, present and the future and at the same time entirely consonant to the aims of life, righteousness and welfare. And it will take the form of your leading back the lady Sita to Raghuvira. It cost me no end of effort to come upon her. I but await the orders of my lord Rama as to the course I should adopt hereafter. I beheld my Sita tortured by unspeakable grief and sorrow. Has it never occurred to you that you can more safely rule a terrible five-headed serpent in your lap and fondle it, than bring that most chaste and virtuous lady? You may say that she would be of no further use to Rama if you have blackened her fair chastity. Now tell me if you can dine to the full, on food mixed with deadly poison and digest it. Why, the gods and the *asuras* dare not call their lives their own, if they ever carry this lady to their homes. Is it just, I ask you, to destroy most recklessly the results of your hard-earned *tapas,* carefully conducted rights and penances, your deeds of righteouness and your frame of adamant length of years and power limitless, that are the visible rewards thereof?

But should you say 'I hold a boon of immunity from death at the hands of the gods and the *asuras* through the might of my *tapas,'* you lean upon a broken reed that will pierce your side. Now heed most carefully to what I say. Sugriva is no god, no *asura,* no *rakshasa,* no *danava,* no *pannaga;* hence how could you keep your life from his dreadful clutches?

Again you may fondly delude yourself with the hope 'I have till now perpetrated many a sin, many a crime, many an act of infamy. And I cannot escape from the *karma* that dogs my heels in punishment. What care I for your good counsels, impotent as they are?' Now should a person have to his account, acts of goodness and vice, he does not reap their results of happiness and misery at the same time. Light and darkness do not coexist. Right begets happiness; and the wrong for ever begets misery.

Again you may cheat yourself with the sophistry, 'The *Vedas* tell us that a man undoes the effects of his sins by fresh acts of righteousness. So the good deeds that lie to my account in the past will make short work of the evil acts committed later on. They will fend me from misery and danger.' Alas! it is not so. All your acts of virtue were anterior to your infamous abduction of the lady Sita. They have exhausted themselves in giving the power, the wealth and the luxury and the magnificence you have enjoyed till now. They are barren now and hereafter. But there yet remains untouched, the store of your black deeds. It will overwhelm you, with every kind of misery and there is no warding it off; it will lay the axe at the root of everything that you hold dear and near.

So do not seek to rely upon your account at the bank of virtuous deeds in the past. You have overdrawn it and your bank is broken. And you have to meet with your unrighteous past and that at no very distant date and drink of the cup of misery, disgrace and ruin, to its very dregs.

Do not slight me and my well-meant counsels as proceeding from an insignificant monkey; for, my words are certain and true. So, raise a wall of extraordinary virtue and good, while there is yet time to stand between you and your terrible *karma*. Bestow careful thought on the fate of your fourteen thousand *rakshasa*-warriors at Janasthana; think well of the sad fate of Vali, your captor of yore whom a single arrow of Rama despatched to the mansions of Death; revolve most carefully in your mind upon what will be the outcome of the alliance between Rama and Sugriva; and take such steps as will conduce to your utmost good and happiness. I need no help to destroy this Lanka of yours with its *rakshasa* millions and the armies that guard them. But Sri Rama holds no such view at present. He has passed his word before the monkey-lords that he would lay low in battle dire him who had dared to lay foul hands upon the lady Sita. The very lord of the *devas* is but a dead man, should he think of giving offence to Raghava. Then it is but a waste of breath to speak of what will befall others like yourself. You delude yourself with the hope that the lady Sita is in your hands. But know from me that she is the dread power known as Kalaratri that has come to consume this Lanka to ashes in its wrath. Do not throw around your neck, the noose of Death named the lady Sita. Seek the best way to save yourself. See you not that your capital is slowly being burnt down to nothing through the fire of the chastity of Sita and the wrath of Rama? Seek not to destroy in vain your friends, your well-meaning ministers, your kith, your kin, your brothers, your sons, your luxury, your magnificence and your confiding wives.

I am no monkey of the ordinary type; Sri Rama, the lord of the countless worlds, has deigned to take me into his service; he has entrusted me with a very delicate mission that concerns his lady and has sent me over here.

My lord Rama is the very incarnation of truth, right, compassion and other noble excellences; and I, his humble servant, cannot speak false. My lord Raghunatha is capable of dissolving, in his aspect of lord Rudra, this universe fashioned of the five elements and the creation thereon, movable and otherwise; and he can recreate them as the lord Brahma. There stands none beside him or above. The *Vedas* say, 'His name is' 'Fame unbounded' and it is so, even when he has come down on earth in human shape. At no time, at no place was there any one who faced Rama in fight and lived to speak of it. For, he is like unto Mahavishnu in might. The gods, the *asuras,* the kings, the *yakshas,* the *rakshasas,* the *vidyadharas,* the *gandharvas,* the *uragas,* the *siddhas,* the *kinnaras* and the *patagas,* nay, the entire creation itself, holds not the equal of Rama. He is the lord of the countless worlds; he is the king of kings; and is there any shadow of doubt fleeting across your mind that you could offend him most mortally and hold your lease upon life? Again I say that the gods, the demons, the *gandharvas,* and *vidyadharas,* the *nagas,* the *yakshas* and others, like unto them in all the myriads of worlds, lay their heads at the feet of Rama as their lord and protector; and is it upto them to face him in dread battle?

In short, I lay it down as an impregnable truth that should Sri Rama pass his word to slay any one, it is but sheer waste for Indra, the lord of the *devas,* to rescue him by seeking battle with the son of Dasaratha. It matters not that he, Indra, is the ruler of the three worlds; it does not count anything that he has slain in fight the dread *asuras,* Vritra, Namuchi, Vala and the like; it matters not that he has at his back, his armies of gods thirty and three crores in number.

Let it pass. You may say, 'Lord Rudra, whose single glance of fire consumes the entire universe to nothing, is he not a meet opponent to this, your Rama?' Now, that dread power of his waits upon him, only at the time of universal dissolution and not otherwise.

You may say, 'It is but child's play to him, who reduced to ashes with a look of his third eye, the powerful god of love and the mighty Triad of *asuras* of the City'. Now, each and every one of them were black with guilt; and the Eye of wrath was potent against them. But it is helpless against Sri Rama, the fountain and source of all noble virtues.

Let it pass. Again you may argue 'What of Brahma, the first-born of Narayana? He in his turn is the parent of Rudra. And can he not prevail over Rama?' Alas, he too cannot and dare not transgress the Great Law of Causation. Do you say 'He is not like unto others, but he is unborn and knows no creator?' What can he do, single-handed? Again if you contend 'He and he alone has the power to sound forth the four *Vedas* through his four mouths,' that rare gift is helpless in this case. Why? Take it as my last word to you that any one of these, single or banded together stand paralysed before my lord Rama."

Thus spake Hanuman most fearlessly and undaunted words, entirely unpleasant and hateful to Ravana under the thin veil of healthy advice. The lord of Lanka was tall with pride and knew no one equal to him in any way at any time or in any place. So, he rolled his eyes about in blazing wrath and without wasting a single thought upon Maruti cried out, "Kill for me, this wretch of a monkey."

CHAPTER 52

VIBHISHANA INTERCEDES

AT these words of Maruti, Ravana was beside himself with wrath and roared out an order, "Kill for me this wretch of a monkey." Vibhishana heard it and said to himself, "Alas! Is it a fault of the messenger if he puts forth correctly what his master sent through him? It is most unjust to deal death to this emissary. But my brother Ravana is mad with fury; very soon he will put this monkey to death. Let me think out the best plan in these circumstances."

He thought deeply over it and came to a decision. Most valiant and courageous of heart, not a shadow of fear clouded his mind at the thought of opposing the *rakshasa* king. Most skilful of speech, he was dead sure that he would carry out his purpose. So he bowed in low reverence to Ravana and spoke to him, words of healthy advice as dictated by peaceful means.

"Ruler of the destinies of the *rakshasa*-world! Stay your hand; put away anger from you; let not your mind be troubled; pay careful heed to my words. Monarchs who are wont to discriminate keenly between justice and its opposite, will not set their hearts upon putting to death, ambassadors, emissaries and messengers of other kings. Lord! this one is such a messenger; he is but a puny monkey; to kill him is against the rules of kingly polity; it will bring down the rebuke and condemnation of every one; and it ill becomes your strength and valour and fame. You are well-versed in the knowledge of the duties, the rights and the privileges of all beings; a past master in political science; an excellent judge of right and wrong; standing head and shoulders above others in your knowledge of the inner truth of things; ever careful to remember the slightest act of benefit from others; should such wise men like you, give way to anger, it is but dry work and a waste to study the sciences. You are the holder of the destinies of the entire *rakshasa*-world; you have but to put forth your hand and all your foes are nowhere; I see no one that could take his place by you in every respect. I pray you to deign to keep your hand from perpetrating this useless crime. Let us first make careful and detailed enquiries of this case and then if necessary punish him accordingly."

Ravana heard him out. But his anger was yet blazing and he replied to Vibhishana, "You count yourself one of the most valiant and yet you speak thus. Is it a crime to slay criminals? And have you seen any other who is a greater criminal? So it is most proper that he should be done to death?"

Now, Vibhishana was endowed with a very high order of intellect and said to himself, "Alas! the words of my brother are entirely dissonant to right and justice. Anger makes him forget himself. And the bad and wicked men about him delight in such cruel deeds. Yet, I must speak out at any cost."

Then he addressed himself to his brother and spoke to him, words of the highest import. "Lord of Lanka! I pray you to extend your kindness and forbearance unto me. I pray you pay heed to my words that are not dissonant to the great aims of life. The wise say 'A messenger should never be put to death at any time or at any place whatever'. Should you say 'this one is something else besides a messenger; he is our mortal foe who has destroyed our friends and armies. So it is no crime to punish him as he deserves.' I admit he is our foe, I admit he has done us great harm and has put upon us black disgrace. I admit that if we allow him to grow in his power, he will destroy us entirely. But I contend at the same time that we should not kill him,as he is an emissary from another king. The wise have devised many a way of punishing messengers. Mutilation of limbs, the lash and the whip, the shaving of the head and such other methods of punishment as will leave their permanent marks upon him, are laid down in these cases, but not death. Now you are unrivalled in your knowledge and practice of the aims of life; you have views settled and reasoned out after a careful examination of what is good for you and otherwise. And if you dip your hand in crime carried away by your anger, how could other men of might restrain their rising wrath? I see no one who is your equal in the careful analysis of duty, in worldly wisdom and in the close and deep study of the inner secrets of our sciences. You and you alone stand towering above the *devas* and the *asuras*. I can see good accruing from the death of this monkey. It would be more seemly if we deal out that punishment to him who sent this monkey-messenger. He who is sent out by a foe, be he a good man or be he otherwise, is yet the servant of another; he but acts as the mouthpiece of another. It ill becomes us to kill such a one. For, if this one dies under our hands, I see no other who could leap over this vast waste of waters and come to us. There would be no one to carry back the news to our foes Rama and Lakshmana and bring them over here to fight with us. They have till now been prevented from coming here, those cruel ones, only because the way is so long and difficult. If we let this monkey go he will somehow or other bring them over here. And then it would be easy work to kill them too. The *devas* and the *asuras* rejoicing in their plenitude of valour, enthusiasm and courage, can never dream of defeating you in battle. The *rakshasas* look up to you to fulfil their highest aspirations and ambitions and bestow joy, peace and plenty upon them; and it is all unjust for us to deprive them, the *rakshasa*-warriors, of the joy of a fight with Rama and Lakshmana, for which they are eagerly waiting and for which their hands are itching. Your armies are entirely devoted to your greatness and welfare, most valiant, bound to you by bands of steel through the honours, the rewards and the benefits they have received at your hands, born of the highest lineage, most skilful in executing the affairs entrusted to them, veterans grown grey in war, of undaunted heart and courage and gifted with many an excellence besides. So, send them forth, your *rakshasa*-millions against the fools, Rama and Lakshmana, to put the disgrace upon them that they did to you and let them have a taste of your greatness, might and power."

Ravana, the lord of the *rakshasas* was mighty enough and strong to make the *deva*-hosts cry out for mercy; yet, the words of Vibhishana, pleasant to him and healthy, found acceptance in his heart.

CHAPTER 53

THEY SET FIRE TO THE TAIL OF MARUTI

AT the words of Vibhishana, so well suited to the time and the place, Ravana spoke in reply, "Vibhishana! I admit that you speak true in saying that messengers should not be put to death. So, deal with this wretch in any other way as will leave our mark upon him for all time. The monkeys hold dearest, their tail, is it not? So, set fire to it and drive him out of our capital. Let his friends and kin rejoice in the sight of his tail-less beauty and spiritless countenance. Set fire to his tail and take him round all through the city of ours."

Immediately the *rakshasas*, burning with anger at the thought that Maruti had cruelly slain many a one dear to them, wrapped round his huge tail, old clothes. Like unto a forest fire feeding upon the dried wood therein, the tail of Hanuman grew and grew. Then they drenched it with oil and set fire to it.

Now Anjaneya, blazing in splendour and wrath like the morning sun, struck down with his burning tail hundreds and thousands of the *rakshasas* about him. Women, children and old men came out in crowds in great glee to have a look at the wicked monkey whose tail was on fire. Though kept back by the mighty strokes of Maruti, they yet surged around him and tried to put him under bonds. Then Maruti said to himself, "What is it to me if they bind me to their hearts' content? I have but to give room to a wish and these bonds are no where and these wretches are but viewless atoms. Do they call this a punishment to the havoc I wrought upon them? All these *rakshasas* massed together cannot afford me decent fight for this single arm of mine. Now that I recall to my mind that Sri Rama has vowed to destroy Ravana and Lanka, it behoves me to keep from fighting and take a careful view of Lanka and inspect it. It is nothing to me to ignore the worries and the insult that these creatures put upon me. I had but an indistinct view; and that at night, of this Lanka, its walls, its fortifications and its defences. But I should have a more careful look at the same in broad daylight. Ravana has ordered that I should be carried round all through Lanka; and he but plays my own game though he knows it not. Then when we come here to fight, it would serve me mightily. I must carefully take note of all places on my way that I may at some future time come upon the lady Sita, be she hid anywhere in this capital. Let these wretches please themselves to their hearts' content with binding me and setting my tail on fire. It affects me not in the least, neither in body nor in mind."

Endowed with boundless strength as he was, he entirely kept back his true nature and showed himself to them as a puny monkey. So the *rakshasas* laid their hands upon him and led him all through the city. "We have brought you in bounds the wicked monkey that slew our *rakshasa*-heroes by hundreds," cried they to the sound of the conches, the drums and trumpets as they led Maruti along and slapped their shoulders and thighs in their pride of victory. He could have lightly and in sport, as it were, slain his foes, man, god or demon. The mighty son of Vayu remained in the grip of the *rakshasas* and made a most careful scrutiny of the town as he passed through it. Mansions of curious design, wonderful varieties of aircraft, subterranean halls and houses most ingeniously concealed, well-laid crossings, main roads, streets and huge castles, neat cottages, met his view. Guards were on their watch on the high roads, the crossings, the doomed halls and shouted in glee, "Lo! The messenger who came here to possess himself of our secrets."

Then crowds of women, boys, girls and old folk poured out of their homes to have a sight of Hanuman and his burning tail.

Meanwhile the *rakshasis* in the *asoka* grove ran to Janaki and cried, "Sita! There was a red-faced monkey that had speech with you, some time ago. They have set his tail on fire and are taking him around every part of Lanka." Now Maruti was dearest to her heart. He stood between her and impending death. He brought her welcome news of her beloved Rama. He gave her back as it were life, happiness and fairfame. And even he, was now in the clutches of danger and death. She writhed in agony as if her life-breaths were being torn out of her. She sought the grace and protection of the Lord of fire that no ill could come to Hanuman. Her eyes grew bright with the love she felt towards Maruti. She would bring him safety and peace. So she purified herself and offered worship and adoration to the lord Agni.

"If it is true that I have rendered dutiful service to my Lord Rama, in thought, in word and in deed; if it is true that my heart enshrines no other image but his, grant me as the result of my devotion that Hanuman feels cool and happy at your touch.

"If Rama the soul of wisdom feels the slightest love and affection towards me; if it is so decided by Fate that I am to be delivered from my sorrows and go back to the side of my lord, let Maruti feel no discomfort, but keep cool under your touch.

"If the noble and virtuous Hanuman knows full-well that my heart is pure and straight and that it throbs eagerly for the moment when my lord will seek me out, then I pray you scorch not his body but bring coolness and pleasure to it.

"If it is true that Sugriva, the soul of truth, will raise me from the depths of my grief, let Hanuman feel utterly cool under your touch."

And lo, the Lord of fire, as if whispering to Maruti, the news of the safety of Sita, put away his fiery breaths and burnt speedily with slight inclinations to the right. The Lord of fire would be of good service to Sita and change into a delicious icy coolness, the hot flames that surrounded the burning tail of Maruti.

On his part, the son of Vayu observed that his tail was on fire and that he felt no heat and no pain thereby. "Wonderful! my tail blazes like a hill on fire. The heat and the flames grew apace. But I feel not the slightest discomfort thereby. I enjoy the delicious sensation as if all the coolest articles in the world were wrapped round it. But I should not forget that when I leaped across the stormy waters, at the behest of Rama, the watery depths too afforded a resting place for me; and it was in recognition of the boundless might and power of Raghuvira. Now, this too is another such instance of it. My lord Agni might well be as enthusiastic in the service of

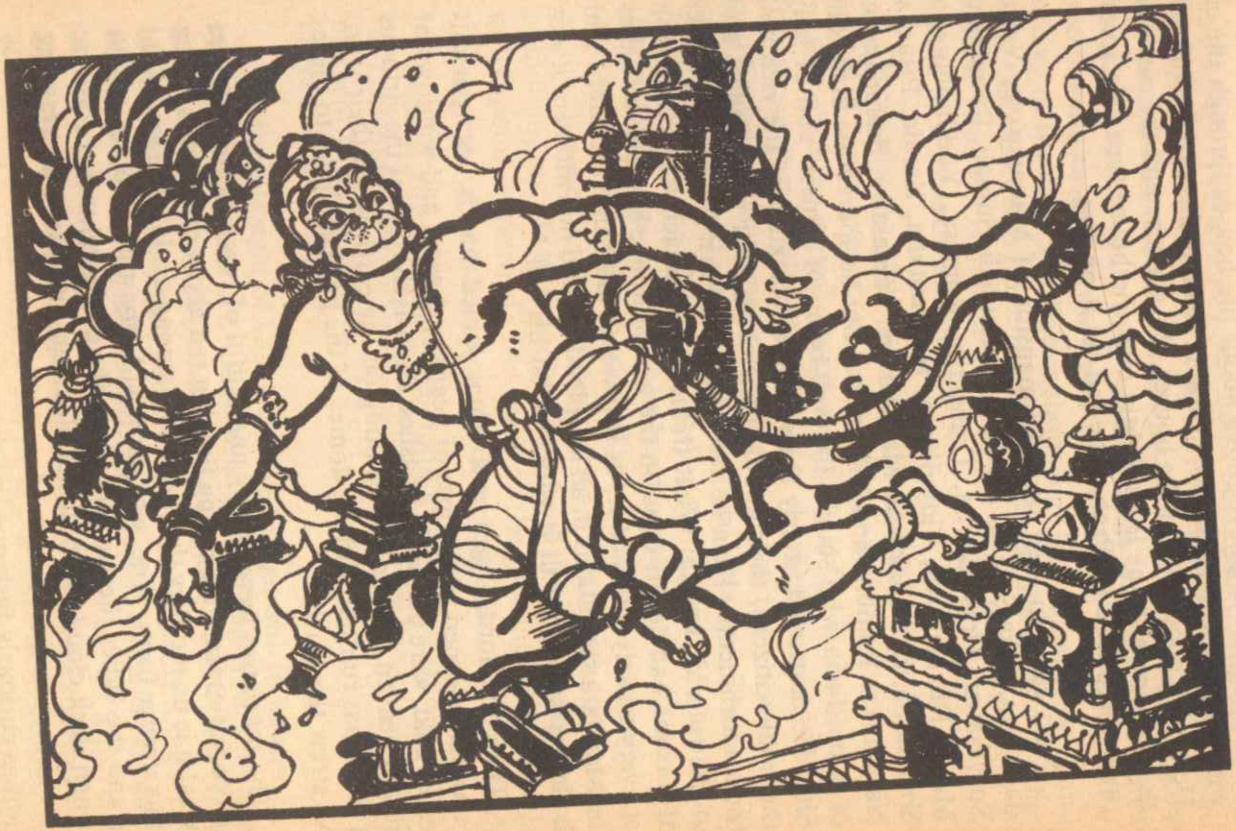
Rama as the Lord of the waters. I owe it to the greatness of Rama; I owe it to the great friendship between my father and the lord Agni that I feel not his fiery touch."

He took counsel with himself for some time as to his future course of action. All at once, he sprang up with terrible roars and was seen at the top of the lofty fortress gates, even like a mountain resting on the top of another. With the speed of thought his form grew mountainous in bulk; and as quickly did it contract itself most subtly. His bonds fell away from him. Then he resumed his vast proportions and glancing around he saw a huge bar of iron lying on the door-step. He swung it aloft and smashed to death the guards there and the *rakshasas* around. The monkey-hero, was taking his observations of the town, his burning tail towering aloft like a mountain peak on fire. He gave one the idea of the lord, the sun in all the effulgence of his thousand rays.

CHAPTER 54

HANUMAN SETS LANKA ON FIRE

"I found out the whereabouts of Sita; I gave her welcome news of Rama and consoled her; I take back news of her to my lord Rama. I have tested the strength and weakness of these *rakshasas;* I had speech with Ravana and guessed his intent and purpose. Now is there anything left for me to do?" Thus did Anjaneya take counsel with himself as he glanced carefully around with ever-increasing energy and enthusiasm. "What shall I do to bring grief and misery to these *rakshasas?* I have destroyed the *asoka* grove; I have slain the prominent *rakshasa*-heroes; I have put out of fight for ever, an appreciable part of Ravana's forces; I have only to pull down the fortresses and its defences; All my plans, all my exploits till now will be fitly crowned thereby. Yet I must secure my object more by tact and skill than by putting myself out to undue exertion and trouble. The Lord of fire has laid me under a deep debt of gratitude for having saved my life, when it was in his hands; and I cannot please him better than by offering these buildings to stay his appetite. Having thus decided upon his future course of



action, Maruti began to move about the houses through the city with his blazing tail like unto lightning flashing through dark clouds. He took a good look at the houses, the gardens and the castles of the *rakshasas,* as he leapt lightly over the house tops. He sprang upon the palace of Prahastha and set it on fire.

Next came in their turn the mansion of Mahaparsva, Vajradamshtra, Suka Sarana, Indrajit, Jambumali, Sumali, Rasmiketu, Suryasatru, Hrasvakarna, Damshtra, Romasa, Yuddhonmatta, Matta, Dhvajagriva, Vidyujjihva, Hastimukha, Karala, Pisacha, Sonitaksha, Kumbhakarna, Makaraksha, Yajnasatru, Brahmasatru, Narantaka, Kumbha and Nikumbha. But he spared the mansions of Vibhishana who sought the well-being of himself and of lady Sita. He destroyed utterly the wealth and luxury of the rich and the noble citizens, their goods, their corn, their conveyances and their adornments. Then he reserved to the last the grand palaces of the ruler of Lanka. What tremendous audacity! The mansion of Ravana had not its equal in the worlds above and below. Gems of every variety adorned it, as it towered aloft like the Meru and the Mandara mountains in all its splendour and in a moment it was in flames as Maruti lit it with fire on his tail.

Then the lords Agni and Vayu joined hands, as spacious mansions adorned with ropes of pearls and gems and windows of beaten gold, were but heaps of ashes. Even as the cars of the virtuous ones in heaven, fall down headlong on the earth when their store of merit has run out, did the domes of the palaces shiver to pieces and strew the earth.

The *rakshasas* were utterly unmindful of rescuing their houses and properties from the raging fire; but ran about on all sides crying "Alas! it is no monkey that has come among us. It is the lord Agni in this strange form. Woe, woe unto us! Lofty storied houses caught fire and the ladies therein fell down like chain lightnings flashing through dark clouds with dishevelled hair and garment, clasping their children to their breast. Maruti beheld with wonder countless buildings curiously fashioned of diamond, coral, pearl and silver, melt and run through the intense heat in streams and with them the gold and silver and other metals.

Yet that voracious god was not a bit satisfied with the wood and the straw thrown into it. Even so, Maruti was not a bit satisfied with the countless *rakshasa* corpses that strewed the earth, blackened to cinders, thanks to the lord Agni. Perhaps his heart would have beaten with joy should the entire Lanka with all that was in it be a thing of the past. The flames shone here like *palasa* flowers and there like silk cotton flowers. And they blazed like saffron in other places. Thus did Hanuman offer to the Lord of fire, the city of Lanka as a pleasant sacrifice.

Then Anjaneya took his way to the mount Trikuta. The fire he started in Lanka overtopped it like a canopy and proved conclusively to the world the logical dictum that there is fire in the mountain. The flames that enveloped the house of *rakshasas* reached the skies and blazed without smoke as if the bodies of the *rakshasas* were sacred ghee poured into it as a sacrificial oblation. The lords of Agni and Vayu cowed in terror till then at the sight of Ravana; now that Hanuman has put away their fear from them, they joined hands and set about to make short work of the city of their hated foe, even as it were the Day of Destruction by fire; with the radiance of million suns did that terrible fire spread through Lanka and left no pinpoint untouched. The crash of the splitting of the articles therein rent to pieces as it were the uttermost bounds of the worlds.

Decked with the flames like unto a garland of *palasa* flowers, the Lord of fire towered aloft, his head lost in the heaven. The smoke of spent fires hid the clouds from view and made them take the likeness of blue lilies.

The terrible sight of Lanka blazing on high with its houses, trees and the living beings in it and reduced to black cinders in a moment, set many a keen-witted person therein exclaim "Verily, this cannot be the puny monkey that runs along the tree tops. Is it the lord of the celestials, darting his thunders upon us. Or, is Mahendra himself that slew out of hand the frightful *asura* Vritra. Or is it Varuna the Lord of waters, Vayu the ruler of air, or Rudra the dread lord of Kailasa, or Agni the lord of Fire or Surya the lord of a thousand rays, or Kubera the lord of wealth. Or, is it the Lord of death and time come down among us in visible shape? Nay it cannot be anything but the black wrath of the lord Brahma the fashioner of the universe that has chosen to come down as a monkey to root out the unfortunate *rakshasas*. Nay it is something else. Is it the unthinkable might and effulgence of Mahavishnu, even he who is beyond time, space and matter, whom the senses and the mind reach not, who is one without a second? It must be he who has chosen to take this monkey form, to exterminate the *rakshasa* creation through his irresistible power of illusion (*maya*).

Rakshasas, horses, elephants, birds, beasts, trees and all that were in Lanka, animate and otherwise, were destroyed by Maruti. Heart-rending cries rose from it on all sides. "Boy! Father! Husband! Friend! Most cruelly have you been done to death. Happiness is no more ours. Our lives have been burnt out of us. Alas! what will become of us?" Really it was dreadful to hear and turned one's heart to water. Lanka seemed shrivelled as it were by a mighty curse launched at it. Enveloped in huge flames, its best and bravest now no more; its mighty armies scattered to the winds; the exultant roars of Maruti and his matchless strength completed the work of destruction began by the fire. Like unto the earth destroyed by fiat of the Lord, Lanka was burnt down by the blazing fire, as its demons ran here and there mad with fear and sorrow. And Anjaneya beheld the sight with a glad heart.

He had to his account, the destruction of the vast *asoka* grove bright with leaf and flower, the splendid victory in the fight with redoubtable *rakshasas* and the burning down of the vast capital adorned with its lovely mansions like ropes of gems. His purpose was accomplished. He gave one the idea of the Lord of the day in the glory of his thousand rays as he sat on the peaks of the Trikuta mountain, his still blazing tail towering aloft.

Rakshasas past count did he lay low; the dense *asoka* grove was wiped off the face of the earth; the graceful mansions of the hated *rakshasas* were but pitiful heaps of ashes. Well and skilfully had he carried out the commands of his master. In thought he laid his head at the feet of Rama and said "Lord! At present I am not able to report to you in my physical body all that took place from the moment I left your presence. Yet I submit it in thought; may you find it acceptable."

Then did the gods on high laud mightily, Maruti the bravest and the best of the monkey-heroes, most intelligent, most puissant son of Vayu and like unto himself in speed and in thought. He sat there in all his blinding radiance in the flush of success at having destroyed the *asoka* garden, at having slain in battle famous *rakshasas* and at having set fire to the capital of Ravana. Then the *devas,* the *gandharvas,* the *siddhas* and the *maharshis* wonder ever so greatly as they said, "What matchless courage! What irresistible might! This Lanka to which we dared not till now lift our eyes, is now a heap of ashes. Thanks to the marvellous might of this Maruti, alone and all unaided. All beings beheld him, blazing with energy as he sat on the peaks of Trikuta, he that had accomplished what was utterly impossible to others, "Nay, this is no monkey of the earth. It is nothing else than the fire of the Day of Destruction mortal in shape"; and they drew back from him in sheer terror. Joy boundless, filled the hearts of the *devas,* the *gandharvas,* the *vidyadharas,* the *nagas,* the *yakshas,* the *rishis* and all created beings at the thought of the wondrous deeds of Anjaneya.

CHAPTER 55

MARUTI GRIEVES FOR SITA

THUS Anjaneya set Lanka on fire through and through and put out the flames on his tail by dipping it in the sea. He cast his eyes over the city, now one mass of raging flames with the *rakshasas,* men, women and children howling in terror. It was a vast crematorium. But, his heart was in the iron grip of fear and anxiety. "Alas! In my eagerness to burn down this nest of demons, I have unconsciously perpetrated a terrible crime. Fool that I am". His heart was torn with the nameless horror and he despised himself beyond words.

"Alas! Even as the cool waters quench the raging flames, should a wise and noble man put down the fire of wrath with calm reason, supermen are they and blessed. He that lends himself to passion, there is no crime too dreadful for him. He will raise his hand against the *guru* that opens for him, the eye of wisdom and will pierce the heart of good and holy men with sharp words. He cares not to enquire whether the words that flow from his lips are seemly or no. There is no act too mean for him. There is no word too wicked for him, I call him a man of men who casts aside his anger, as a serpent sheds off his slough. I am the most dreadful of sinners; I am dead to all sense of shame. My heart is dark and wicked; I have clean forgotten that my lady Sita is in Lanka when I set it on fire. Fie upon my intelligence, Lanka on fire means that my lady Janaki is burnt to death. My master's purpose has been ruined utterly, thanks to me the fool par excellence. I have deliberately destroyed that for which I have toiled and laboured so long and so hard. I set fire to Lanka most idiotically without taking previous precautions about the safety of the lady Sita. Alas! all that I have gone through to come at the lady Janaki are but a terrible waste. I gave way to senseless fury and laid the axe at the root of the object of my mission. Lanka is a heap of ashes from end to end; so, the lady Janaki has met with a terrible death. I owe it to myself to pay with my life the penalty for my stupidity. I will cast myself into the fire that I have senselessly built up or I will throw myself into the ocean fire *Badava,* or I will offer this worthless carcass of mine as food for the creatures of the deep. Having thus ruined my lord's plans and brought him bitter disappointment, how shall I face Sugriva, Rama and Lakshmana? Henceforth, I am a mark for all time that the entire creation will point out in derision as the fool of a monkey that had betrayed its birth and nature by giving way to senseless wrath and perpetrated a terrible sin. It was in me to safeguard my lady Sita; yet in my foolish passion I clean forgot that prime duty of mine. That passionate temper of mine, fie upon it. I am too feeble to curb it. It is so elusive.

Rama has but to hear the news of the dreadful death of the lady Sita to quit his hold on life and Lakshmana along with him. Then Sugriva and his followers follow suit. Bharata whose life is centered in Rama here and hereafter, will not be long in going along the same path. Then Satrughna, his twin self, his very shadow, would hasten to precede him. Thus the whole race of Ikshvaku is clean wiped off the earth and the subjects that live in the shadow of their protection will quiver with poignant grief. So I, that lent myself as a slave to this black wrath without making sure of the aims of life am the prime cause of the ruin and destruction of this entire creation. You may go to the end of the world and search for all eternity to come upon another miserable wretch like myself."

But once before he was about to cast away his life in his despair at having made a fruitless search for Sita and omens good and happy prevented him. it was the same now. And Maruti was filled with surprise at it. "What! Is it possible that the holy lady is protected from danger and death by her innate greatness? It can well be so. For, the lady Janaki whom all happiness and auspicious purposes vie to adorn, could never cease to exist. Again, snakes do not eat snakes; and the Lord of fire can do nothing against the more powerful fire of her radiance, purity and mighty. Of a truth, the beloved lady of my lord Rama in the shadow of whose arm rests the countless worlds above and below, she is well guarded by him, by her own wifely purity; and the Lord of fire can approach her only at the risk of his life.

Why! he could do nothing with me, since I was the servant of my lord Raghunatha and was under the protection of the lady Sita. She is the object of reverent worship of the brothers, Lakshmana, Bharata and Satrughna. She is dearer to Rama than his very life; and she to meet with her death by fire! That most powerful god has in him to consume any created object but he found himself checked when he came against my tail. And it was because Sita willed that he should not touch me. Now, how could he have it in him to harm her even in thought?"

He recalled to himself, the wonder of the mountain Mainaka rising from the watery depths to offer him a resting place and welcome. "Sita, my lady, is the soul of truth; she has the fleeting senses and their lord, the mind, under perfect control; her heart is centered in her lord and the Lord of fire would meet with his end most dreadfully, should he foolishly seek to lay hands upon her. But she has nothing to fear from him. He recalled to himself the untold greatness of Sita and the mighty of her wifely purity.

Then the *charanas* that range in the heavens above were heard to exclaim, "Wonder of wonders! this Hanuman has accomplished a most impossible feat; he set fire to Lanka from end to end and no object escaped it. Like the creatures in the mountain caves that cry and howl and roar at the approach of a dreadful enemy, do the *rakshasas,* their wives, their children and their elders shriek and yell and moan being slowly consumed to ashes. This bright city with its palaces, towers, mansions has gone the way of nothing in the cruel grip of the Lord of fire. But wonder of wonders! the lady Janaki is safe and sound and happy and cheerful. What wonder can stand by the side of this."

And Maruti drank the welcome news with eager ears. His heart brimmed with gladness at the thought that his lady Sita was safe, thanks to the auspicious and bright omens; thanks to the words of the *charanas.* Then he said to himself, "Now, my purpose is accomplished, my mission is successful, my heart rejoices; and I will but have another talk with the lady Sita to assure myself of her safety ere I go back to my lord."

CHAPTER 56

MARUTI TAKES LEAVE OF SITA

WHEN Hanuman drew near the lady Sita as she sat under the *simsupa* tree and bowed low and reverently. "Noble lady! this Lanka was on fire from end to end. But I should thank my stars that you escaped without the slightest harm from it. Now I pray you give me leave to go back."

She saw him about to depart and looked at him again and again with eyes overflowing with gratitude and kindness. "Verily, this is no ordinary monkey; but a most mighty hero, who destroyed this *asoka* grove, killed the *rakshasa*-guards that guarded it and set this proud capital of Ravana on fire. Nay, he would even seek out Raghava and say, 'These *rakshasas* count as nothing in my eyes. I could, in the twinkling of an eye, slay them and bring you back the lady Sita and sound. But it befits not the dignity of Rama. I like it not; and I should take measures to prevent it."

So, she expressed herself to him in words that breathed her supreme love to Raghava; "Anjaneya! Full well do I know that you, all by yourself, can slay out of hand, these *rakshasa* myriads and take me back to the side of my lord. You will cover yourself with untold fame and renown thereby, but it would be more seemly if Rama should cover this nest of *rakshasas* with his arrows, deal unto them the death they deserve and take me back. It would be more consonant with his fair name and valour. It would be a fit punishment for the slight, that Ravana has put upon him. You should do nothing to dim his bright name. On the other hand, you must so plan and act, that his renown would blaze the brighter in the eyes of the world and he, the hero who never turned his back upon a foe, as yet."

Anjaneya listened to her words so tactful, so reasonable, so reverent, and so helpful to the achievement of Rama's purpose. He spoke back to her, "Noble lady! Verily, your wishes are bound to be realised at no distant time. Raghuvira and the myriads of monkey-heroes that follow him will soon be here. He will wipe out his foes from the face of the earth in dire battle and lead you back to Ayodhya. I vouch for the truth of this statement." Thus, did he console the lady Janaki and saluted her again intending to depart. His purpose well-achieved, Maruti longed to behold his lord and master and went up the mount Arishta. It was lined with lofty *padmaka* trees and looked black from the woods that clothed it. The clouds that hung between its peaks resembled the fleecy upper garments. The soft rays of the Lord of day roused it from its slumbers and it opened its eyes of many-hued mountain ore to gaze upon its lover. Roaring torrents gave one the idea of the disciples of a *maharshi* chanting the *Vedas* after him. The fast-falling cascades on its sides spoke sweet music to the ear. The sky-topped deodars on its heights made one think that the mountain-god was praying to his deity with upraised hands. Here, the slow water glided off hard blocks of stone with a soft moaning sound. There the dark *saptaparna* trees moved gently in the breeze as if the mountain shivered with cold. The wind blowing through the bamboo groves took with it, notes of infinite variety that fell pleasantly on the ear. There the hot breath of huge serpents recalled to one, the idea of the mountain hissing in uncontrollable wrath. The ice-covered caves made it look a devotee wrapt in meditation. Its graceful slopes, upon which glide the variegated clouds make it live and move; and as it were all round its lofty peaks, crowned with fleecy cloud-garlands gives us the impression that it grows and grows aloft.

Maruti left behind him the shattered fragments of huge caves that came against his mighty feet. Rare and lofty trees, bamboo groves, creepers bending under the weight of bright flowers, delicious fruits, roots and bulbs, beasts and birds of infinite variety, priceless ores, torrents, cataracts, huge blocks, deep caves, wherein lions took shelter, tigers, groups of *maharshis, yakshas, gandharvas, kinnaras* and *uragas* — these and much more met the eye of Anjaneya as he strode up the mountain, with a cheerful heart all eager to behold his lord once again. Huge blocks crumbled to dust under his tread and fell down on all sides with a deafening roar.

Then he set his mind upon crossing back the watery waste that lay between him and the farther shore on the north; he grew and grew; he prayed the lord Raghava to grant that he coursed back safe and soon with no obstacles to bar his way. He reached its summit and beheld before him the dreadful sea stretch for many a league and teem with terrible monsters of the deep. He resolved that he would, like his father, course swiftly across the sky and reach its farther shores. The huge and lofty mountain sank deep into the earth under the weight of his tread. The crash of falling peaks and shattered trees,the cries of the creatures that inhabited it, all blended in a huge roar, as if the mountain was sending a last cry of despair as it vanished into the depths of the earth. The lofty trees in flower and fruit, that clad its side were shattered by the force of his thighs, as if struck by the bolts of Indra and covered the earth far and near. It was frightful to hear the roars of huge lions in their caves, shiver with dread and reduced to utter helplessness at the mighty conclusion that followed Anjaneya's leap across the sky. The *vidyadhara* ladies that disported themselves on the mountain slopes rose aloft from it in senseless haste, their garments slipping away from them and their ornaments shivering and shattering all around them. Huge pythons of matchless strength lolled out their flaming tongues as they vomitted dreadful poison with their heads and necks crushed out of all shape as they lay in coiled masses.

And from the mountain so harassed and tortured by Maruti, the hosts of *kinnaras, uragas, gandharvas, yakshas,* and *vidyadharas* rose aloft to seek safer homes. His weight and force was too much for it, the lofty mountain thirty *yojanas* in length and ten in breadth; it sank into the depths of the earth with its trees and beasts and birds and nothing remained to mark the place where it once raised its head in pride to the heavens. Hanuman next set himself to course across the dreadful sea that lay before him, boisterous with mountainous waves and leapt into the sky all lightly.

CHAPTER 57

MARUTI'S RETURN

IN the limitless watery expanse of the sky blossoms the lily known as the Lady of the night. The Lord of the day is the water-fowl therein. The constellations Pushya and Sravana are the swans that sail therein. The dark clouds are the moss and weeds. The star Punarvasu is the big fish that disports in its waters. Mars is the crocodile. Airavata, one of the elephants that support the earth, is the huge island in it. The star Svati is another swan upon it. The swift currents that course through it, are the never-ceasing billows. The cool beams of the moon are its waters. The hosts of the *yakshas,* the *gandharvas,* the *uragas* and the like, are the blown flowers that grace it. Thus did Hanuman, the first-born of Vayu, course across the firmament, the fathomless sea on high, even like a lordly ship. He flashed through it and seemed to drag in tow the cloud-banks after him; now, he seemed to swallow by pieces the sky before him; now, he seemed to claw at the moon ahead. And anon, he seemed to snatch at the stars and the sun in the heavens overhead. He passed through the clouds, white, red, blue-red, yellow-red and yellow, and the fleecy garment on his shoulders gave him the appearance of the Queen of the night, now bright, now dim by turns as it were. Sometimes, he looked as if he were the mighty Garuda, as he passed through the sky cleaving aside the huge cloud-banks. Roaring like surcharged rain-clouds or the fierce lions in their fury, Anjaneya laid low the terrible *rakshasa*-hosts and left behind him at Lanka, a name that they would not forget in a hurry. He laid the city in ruins, brought shame and sorrow to the heart of Ravana, turned to water the stout hearts of his armies, had speech with the lady Sita and took her message to Rama and crossed back to render report of his mission. On his way, he met the mountain Mainaka, acquainted him in brief with his adventures and like a shaft shot by a strong archer, sped back with frightful speed. Then he neared the mount Mahendra like unto a huge cloud-bank and sent ahead terrible roars like unto those that come out on the last day; the earth, the sky and the quarters around trembled in affright as he announced his triumphant return. All eager to have a sight of his friends, he waved his tail aloft and roared again. Thereat the vast firmament studded with planets and stars seemed to fall in pieces, shattered thereby.

The monkey-hosts, that lined the shores on the north of the sea, all afire to have the first view of Maruti as he returned to them, caught the sound of his terrible roars and of the gale that rushed between his thighs like unto the storm clouds lashed by powerful gales. Heavy of heart they gazed far into the distance to catch sight of him first, when Jambavan called unto him the expectant monkeys and spoke to them out of a glad heart, "Take it from me that our Hanuman comes back to us, his mission successfully achieved everyway. Else, he would not have the heart to roar out to us his message so boldly and so joyfully." Next, the monkeys caught the sound of the wind rushing through his arms and thighs and leapt about the joy of their hearts. All eager to bless their eyes with a sight of the triumphant hero, they sprang from tree to tree and from mount to mount. From their perch on the tree tops they shook its bows mightily as they welcome a friend by waving aloft their garments. And he their life and hope, came on roaring lustily like the winds in huge mountain caves. They beheld him slowly come to the earth like a huge cloud sliding down the mountain slopes and saluted him with clasped hands in boundless reverence. And then Maruti checked his speed and alighted on the mountain Mahendra clothed with bright forests, like unto a brother mountain paying a friendly visit. His form grew, as it were, with joy, at the sight of his friends to whom he appeared like a huge mountain of yore coming to the earth with its mighty wings shorn off. At once they crowded around him with blooming faces and joyful hearts, the leaders, the captains and their followers and vied with one another to offer him welcome tribute of roots, fruits and bulbs, to celebrate the happy return of the mighty hero safe and sound.

Anjaneya bowed low in reverence to Jambavan, Angada and the other elders and they welcomed him back heartily. Shouts of applause and cheer rent the sky from the throats of millions of monkeys. Next Maruti spake out the words, "Found, found, the lady Sita" the crystallised report of his quest. He then took Angada by the hand and seating themselves on a lovely spot on the slopes of Mahendra, he turned to the expectant monkeys before him and said, "Friends! It was given me to behold the lady Sita whom we have searched for, so long and so hard. She abides at present in the *asoka* grove. Frightful *rakshasas* keep guard over her most vigilantly. Her lovely tresses gathered in a single shapeless braid, all matted and tangled, her fair form dim and emaciated from hunger, she preserves her spotless purity of heart and wifely devotion in the hope that her lord would come to her."

This short message of Anjaneya so pregnant and weighty fell upon the hearts of the sad and anxious monkeys like streams of the waters of life. They clean forgot themselves. Some roared like lions; some shouted aloft madly; some cried out they knew not how; some screached, some gibbered and moaned and chatted; some set themselves against others as to who would roar louder and more frightful; some lashed the earth with their mighty tails; others sprang down from their perches on the mountain peaks and clasped in fond embrace Anjaneya as he stood there like a lordly elephant in rut.

Then Angada at the suggestion of Maruti rose in their midst and said, "Anjaneya! I cast my eyes over the worlds and find not any one who can stand by your side in strength and prowess. You have lightly crossed this huge expanse of waters and come back to us with success. Again do I say that in point of devotion, valour and might, I see no limits to them in you. Was it not given to you to bless your eyes with the sight of the spouse of lord Rama, the fountain of fame and good? Are you not the means of bringing to the heart of Raghava, relief from the heavy grief of separation from the lady Sita?" Next the monkeys gathered round Maruti, Angada and Jambavan and ranged themselves in front on a huge block of stone, all eager to hear in detail the adventures of their hero as he crossed the huge sea, entered the capital of the *rakshasas*, discovered the whereabouts of Sita, had speech with Ravana and what else befell him there. They waited upon Angada even as the gods on high do reverence to Indra, their king.

The huge peaks of the mountain Mahendra shone with splendour as Maruti of bright fame, the valiant Angada and other monkey-leaders spread themselves over its slopes with glad hearts and beaming eyes.

CHAPTER 58

MARUTI MAKES HIS REPORT

THEY gathered on the peaks of Mahendra, Maruti and his friends the monkeys, with hearts brimming over with happiness; then Jambavan, his hair on end with joy, turned himself to the son of Vayu and said, "Maruti! How did you come upon the lady Sita? How is she? How does the cruel Ravana behave towards her? Narrate unto us everything in detail. Let us decide how much we should tell Rama, how much we shall omit and what we shall do next."

Then did Anjaneya raise his hands in glad reverence and laid himself in thought at the feet of Janaki, as he rendered report of his mission as follows. "Right before your eyes did I leap into the air from this mount intending to cross the ocean before us and reach its farther shores. On the way there arose before me from the watery depths, a huge mountain with golden peaks. I took it as an obstacle to my course as it barred my way. I made up my mind to crash through it; and nearing it waved aloft my tail; and brought it down upon the peaks that shone like the sun, shattering it to pieces. The lord of the mountain saw what I was at, and said to me all sweetly and fondly, "My son! Best and bravest of monkeys. I am the dear friend of the lord Vayu, your father. And so, I am your uncle in all justice. This sea is my home at present. They know me here as Mainaka. In the far past, we mountains had mighty wings and flew aloft where fancy took us causing untold havoc and ruin wherever we went. Indra grew wrath thereat and shore off our wings with his *vajra*. Then your father blew me into this sea and saved me from the disgrace and sorrow that befell my brethren. Again the lord Rama is the brightest jewel that shines in the crown of the good and the righteous; the lord of the celestials may, in a way, stand on the same level in prowess. I am bound to render him every service in my power.' Then did I acquaint him with the purpose of my journey and took glad leave of him. Mainaka quit his human shape and slid back into the sea as a mountain.

Then for a long time I coursed through the sea with ever increasing speed. Then did Surasa, one of the gods and the mother of the *nagas* called out to me from the waters and said, 'Mighty monkey! The gods have made you over to me as my meal this day. Long long have I been looking forward to meet you here. And this day you have come to me; and I mean to eat you up.' But I clasped before her, hands of appeal and replied with a sad and humble look 'Mother! Raghava, the son of Dasaratha, is a mighty warrior, radiant of presence. He chanced to abide for a while in the forest of Dandaka for some purpose of his and his brother Lakshmana and his wife Sita lived with him. One day the black-hearted Ravana carried away by force the lady Janaki. Now I go forth at my lord's commands to find her out for him. You as a citizen of his kingdom are equally bound to render him all service in your power. Even if you are not inclined thereto, just give me time to find out Sita, give her the message entrusted by her lord to me and take back her reply to him. I swear to you I will come back and fall into your jaws as your desire.' But Surasa of protean form cried out, 'Nay nay, nothing goes back alive that has once crossed my sight.' Then I grew myself to the extent of ten *yojanas;* and she made herself bigger to swallow me. All at once I turned myself to the height of a thumb, sprang into her mouth and came out in an instant all safe and sound. Then Surasa in her real shape said to me, 'Child! May you accomplish your quest. You will bring together Rama and Sita. May everything good and happy go with you. I am mightily pleased with you for your tact and resourcefulness.' Then did all the creatures above and below acclaim with one voice 'Excellent.'

Then I resumed my rapid flight through the boundless expanse of the sky like unto Garuda, when my flight was checked all at once. My speed slackened, I could not go on. I looked carefully all around, but beheld nothing. 'Wonderful this! What could have barred this rapid flight of mine? I saw no creature before me on my path. Oh! Some one has caught at my shadow and checked me through it.' I thought for a while and tried to pierce the watery depths below. A *rakshasi* of frightful mien floated upon the waters. She laughed in glee at me like thunder and with consummate hardihood and presence of mind cried out, 'Mountainous in bulk are you, my friend. Long long do I starve here with nothing to cross my mouth. Gladden my heart and give over your body to stay my frightful appetite.' I seemed to fall in with her views and grew myself bigger than the expanse of her huge mouth; and she grew larger to swallow me. But she knew not, poor creature that I could take any form at will. So I made myself utterly small, sprang into her mouth, clove her heart and came out to resume my course through the sky. The *rakshasi,* huge like a mountain sank down in frightful convulsions. Then did the *siddhas* and the *charanas* that have their home on high, say to one another 'Hanuman has slain the terrible Simhika.'

Then I resumed my rapid flight through the sky, all intent upon my purpose. The farther shores came into view with its mountainous forests and the city Lanka behind them. The sun set and I managed to enter the capital of the *rakshasas* all unknown to the terrible guards there. Then there arose in my path a huge figure of a woman laughing at me like the clouds on the Day of Destruction. She rushed at me to take my life all easily, that giantess with matted hair blazing like flames. Then I clenched my right hand and crashed her down with a blow and passed over her into the city. I heard her say after me in all humility and reverence, 'Mighty hero! I am the guardian deity of this town. I have fallen before you; and it is only a question of time for the other *rakshasas* to come after me.'

Then I spent about the whole of that night in going through Lanka and at last penetrated into the harem of Ravana himself. But search as I would, I did not come upon the lady Sita. So I gave myself up to despair and was about to turn my back upon the quest, when I cast my eyes on a large and magnificent grove surrounded by a wall of gold. I lightly crossed the wall and beheld the famous *asoka* garden, the heart's pride of Ravana adorned with the rarest and finest trees from all the worlds. There was a huge *simsupa* tree in the centre and all around it, neatly laid out lines of plantain, all of golden hue.

And at the foot of that tree, I beheld a lady of matchless splendour. She gave me the idea of a hind in the grasp of tigresses, as she was most vigilantly guarded by cannibal *rakshasis,* frightful of mien and cruel of heart. She was in the prime of youth; her eyes shone like the petals of the lotus, wet with the dews of night. Lean and emaciated through enforced fast, her face was wan from grief, her magnificent hair veiled with dust. She had but a single garment on her. Her lord and husband ever sat enthroned in the shrine of her heart; utter hate and disgust of Ravana flashed from her like gleams of forked lightning; the *rakshasis* insulted her, taunted her and threatened her with horrible tortures. And she sat on the bosom of her Mother Earth, her hair braided into a shapeless mass and casting looks of fear and apprehension all around. Like unto a lotus pool in autumn, she sat there, her fair complexion dull and dim with dust and dirt, revolving plan upon plan of quitting her hold on life. From my lofty perch on the *simsupa* tree did I bless my eyes with the sight of the beloved of our lord Rama, the head and fountain of fame and renown.

Then I heard issuing from the palace of Ravana the mingled sounds of persons coming towards us, lightened by the tinkling of ornaments such as are affected by women-folk. I was afraid of being found out and reduced myself to a tiny slip of a monkey and like one of the birds on it, burried myself more deeply into the leafy shade. Then Ravana and his ladies drew near the place where Sita sat. Like patience upon a monument smiling at grief, she caught sight of him at a distance and at once drew her thighs together and covered her breasts with her hands. That paragon of wifely virtue, trembled with apprehension, for, she knew not what evil fate had in store for her. She cast looks of piteous appeal all around seeking for someone to stand between her and her fear; but her heart sank as she saw no welcoming hand extended towards her.

Ravana saluted her and said, 'Proud of heart at the consciousness of matchless beauty and grace! I would that your heart inclined towards me with love and affection, but I have waited long enough. Should your haughty spirit not bend to my will, I would even wait on for another two months; but, should I find you foolish and obstinate even then, I will drink your heart's blood.'

Then Sita lost all control over herself and utterly reckless of consequences, she flashed back an insulting reply! 'Meanest and vilest of *rakshasas!* I wonder that your tongue that has dared to give expression to these words all unmeet, to be spoken in the presence of the best beloved of my lord Rama, of boundless radiance, has not yet rotten away. How long is it since you have forgotten that I am the daughter-in-law of king Dasaratha of the line of Ikshvaku? Wretch! Foul sinner! You came upon me when I was all alone in my cottage and my lord far away; and like a miserable thief you stole me from it, all unknown to that noble soul. Fie upon your boasted valour. Dare you even dream of speaking of yourself in the same breath as my lord Raghava? You are not fit even to untie the latchets of his shoes. My lord Raghuvira truthful of speech, the matchless warrior whose name is ever upon the lips of the best and bravest of the worlds, the royal saint who has offered unto the gods, sacrifices beyond count, he and you are poles apart.'

These cruel taunts made Ravana tremble with rage and he rolled his eyes around like the foul fires that shroud the corpse on the pyre. He clenched his right hand and rushed at Sita intent upon slaying her. Thereat the ladies with him cried 'Ha ha'. But among them there was one Mandodari the queen of Ravana. She cast her arms around him and held him back saying 'My lord, what have you to do with Sita, you, whom the very lords of heaven dare not match themselves with, in prowess. Hosts and hosts of ladies from the worlds of gods, *gandharvas* and *yakshas* are awaiting your pleasure. Disport yourself with them. Come away, I pray you.' (It may be noted that these words were referred to have been addressed by Dhanyamalini in Chapter 22).

Then Ravana calmed down a bit and took his way back to his harem, all afire with hot passion and lust.

Then the frightful *rakshasis* on guard around Sita sought to strike terror into her heart by cruel threats. But their howls and cries had not the slightest effect upon Sita. She held them as light as a wisp of straw. They shouted themselves hoarse and took their way to Ravana to report upon the foolish obstinacy of Sita. The others there were tired of persuading her and threw themselves on the earth in a deep sleep of exhaustion all around her. Then the lady Janaki, ever intent upon the fame and happiness of her lord, gave went to piteous lament to relieve the heaviness of her heart. One of the *rakshasis* Trijata by name rose up and cried to the others 'Wicked wretches! Lay no finger upon the lady Sita. If your hunger is too much for you, feed upon yourselves. The daughter of Janaka and the daughter-in-law of Dasaratha, this lady Janaki is not fated to meet her death at your hands. A little while ago I had a wonderful dream that bodes victory and all good to her husband Rama and defeat and destruction to Ravana and his *rakshasa*-hordes. Now pay heed to me when I tell you that this lady and she alone can stand between the dire wrath of Rama and yourselves. Let us cast ourselves at her feet in humble prayer and entreaty. This seems to me the best we could do under the circumstances. Now she is engulfed in deep misery; but ere long, they will fall away from her and happiness and joy will be her portion thereafter'.

The lady Sita listened to her all gladly and her heart rejoiced at the victory that would crown her lord at no distant date. So she spoke out of a grateful heart and said, 'If your words should ever prove true, I will stand between you and fear'.

I resolved upon many a plan to bring solace and relief to her heart placed in that dreadful situation. But my brain was dull and dark. Then I settled within myself as to how I should have speech with her and began to describe the greatness and glory of the lordly line of Ikshvaku. The lady Sita caught my words redounding to the fame and renown of the royal saints and her tears fell fast and free as she cried out, 'Best and bravest of monkeys! Who are you? How did you find your way here? What quest have you come upon? How did you chance to strike an acquaintance with my lord Raghava?'

Then I hastened to reply out of a glad heart, 'Noble lady! Your lord Rama has a dear friend Sugriva by name, mighty beyond description, most valiant among heroes. I am his humble servant and he calls me Hanuman. It is he that has sent me to you. Your lord, the noblest of men has entrusted me with his signet ring to show you as a credential that I come from him. So I place myself at your service and await your commands. What shall I do? Would you have me take you back this instant, to the presence of Rama and Lakshmana? I crave you a reply.'

Then Sita read me through and through and replied 'Pray my lord to come over here with his friends and armies and lead me back after laying low in battle dire, this Ravana and his *rakshasa*-hosts'.

Then I laid my head at the feet of that saintly lady and said 'I pray you give something that would bring trust and joy to the heart of my lord Rama'. And she took a jewel from her hair and gave it to me saying, 'Show this to my lord and he will be sure that you have had speech with me. Anjaneya! I trust you to acquaint my lord with everything about me here. I look forward to you and to no other to bring over Rama, Lakshmana, Sugriva and the monkey-hosts. Should you fail to do so, within the space of two short months, you may take it that you have seen the last of me. My lord Rama may call for me in vain. And I die here like the most helpless and lonely of creatures'. Then did she speak out her purpose most considerately. My heart burnt with wrath as I listened to those piteous words of appeal to me.

I remembered that I had yet a portion of my mission to complete. I grew myself to the bulk of a mountain and all on fire to have at the *rakshasas,* I made a howling waste of that erstwhile magnificent *asoka* grove. The crash of falling trees, the frightened cries of beasts and birds roused the *rakshasis* from their drunken sleep. They saw me flashing about and took word of it to their lord Ravana. 'A foolish monkey, all ignorant of your name, fame and valour has somehow found its way into the *asoka* grove unapproached by any till now and has made short work of it. Let your word go forth to crush the life out of that wretched creature who has dared to become the object of your displeasure.'

Ravana sent against me a renowned battalion of *rakshasas* known as the *kinkaras.* They read into the heart of the ruler of Lanka and carried out his wishes. No soft work in dealing with them. Eighty thousands of them, all armed from head to foot, marched against me; but I made short work of them with a bar of iron I found thereabout. Those that fled in terror from me carried word to Ravana. Next I got up the terrace of the lofty mansion in the centre of the town and wrenching away a huge pillar sent the guards to join their fore-fathers; and along with them the lofty palace that shone as it were, as a bright jewel on the crown of the city. Then the king sent against me Jambumali, the son of Prahastha, one of his ministers and along with him, countless *rakshasa*-warriors. The same bar of iron served me to send them to the mansions of Death, the general grown grey in war and the *rakshasas* that so confidently followed him.

Thereat Ravana despatched seven mighty sons of ministers each at the head of a countless host. The same weapon gave them a speedy transport to the halls of Yama.

Then there followed five generals of his armies all tried veterans; but they fared no better; they and their armies and the earth knew them no more.

Then there came against me Aksha, the son of Dhanyamali, one of his favourite queens. He sprang aloft with his sword raised to cut me down; but I caught him by the feet, swung him round and round and dashed him against the earth a shapeless corpse.

Then Ravana grew wrath beyond all bounds and asked Indrajit, his first born, to make short work of me. The prince was unmatched till then in strength, prowess, valour and pride. Yet I made sad havoc among his armies and left none to tell the tale. I foiled his skills and valour and it brought pride and satisfaction to my heart. His father sent him in full confidence of victory over me. But my foe found that his might and strengh was checked; his weapons and magic missiles passed by me harmless. Then he grew desparate and shot at me the dread weapon of Brahma and bound me, as he thought, helpless.

Then his *rakshasas* roped me all secure and took me to where Ravana sat in audience. He asked me why I come into this capital and slew his *rakshasas* by thousands. "I did so," said I in reply, "to have speech with lady Sita. I am the first born of the lord Vayu and Hanuman they call me. I would pay a visit to lady Janaki and that took me to your palace. I am a monkey; Sugriva ranks me as one of his ministers; Rama has sent me here on a quest; I have some business to transact with you too. My lord Sugriva of matchless splendour, desires to hear about your well-being; and he has sent through me the following message consonant with the aims of life and to your own good."

"I was on the Risyamuka hill one day, when the lord Raghava sought my friendship. He desired me to help him in recovering his beloved lady whom some *rakshasa* had carried away by violence. I requested him to do me a good in turn by slaying Vali my mortal enemy. Then Rama and his brother Lakshmana swore it over the sacred fire. A single shaft from the mighty bow of lord Rama despatched Vali to the mansions of Death and placed me on the throne of the monkey-world. I am bound to serve his purpose in every possible way. I understand that the lady Sita is in your power. Render her back unto Rama without the loss of a moment. My envoy will bring you this message. Should you fail to take my advice, my monkey-myriads will lay low your proud city and everything it contains. Who knows not the terrible might of the monkey-heroes whom the very gods have sought to help them."

Thereat, Ravana was beside himself with wrath and glared at me as if he would reduce me to ashes. The fool knew not what I was like and roared out 'Slay this creature out of hand.'

Then his brother Vibhishana, a very intelligent and clear- hearted man put in his word. "Brother! this is not just; I will not have you do so. This is clean against the traditions of kingly polity. The Books forbid that we should slay messengers, envoys and ambassadors. A faithful servant cannot but do his duty and deliver the message entrusted to him by his master. Even should he exceed his limits and offend you mortally, he should be disgraced or punished but not with death." Ravana thought a while and took the advice so bravely offered on my behalf; and he ordered that they should set fire to my tail.

The cruel *rakshasas* bound me all secure; they hit me with clubs and fists; they tied round my tail, hemp, flags and clothes soaked in oil; they set fire to it and took me along the highways and lanes with laughter and shouts of joy. Then I made myself very small and slipped from my bonds. I grew apace rapidly and smashed them out of all shape with an iron club. Next I proceeded to the fortress gates and like the Fire of Destruction on Doom's day, deliberately set fire to the city on all sides. In no time it was a vast heap of cinders and ashes.

Then there flashed across my brain the thought 'Alas! 'Fool that I am! I have burnt down this Lanka and all unconsciously my lady Sita along with it. I have laid the axe at the very root of the purpose, I meant to achieve here. The deep gloom of misery and remorse was brightened by the words of the *charanas* coursing along the sky, "Wonder that this Lanka is burnt down all through and yet the lady Sita is all unharmed."

Further, the fire on my tail was delightfully cool as ice; my heart was all cheerful; the winds blew soft and pleasant and sweet; my eyes switched auspiciously. The *maharshis* speak true; and the lady Sita has come to no harm at my hands. My heart rejoiced thereat and I took leave of her once again.

I ran up the hill known as Arishta; and all eager to come back to you, I sprang into the sky. I coursed through the firmament, the home of the lords, Vayu, the moon, the sun, the *siddhas* and the *gandharvas;* and I came back to you and it gives me indescribable pleasure to behold you once again. Thanks to your good wishes and prayers for my success, thanks to the greatness and glory of our lord Raghava, I have done my very best in achieving the mission on which our Majesty Sugriva sent us. I leave it to you to plan and carry what yet remains to be done.

CHAPTER 59

MARUTI TAKES COUNSEL WITH HIS FRIENDS

MAY be, it seems to you good that all of us proceed to Lanka, overthrow Ravana and take back the lady Sita to the presence of Rama and Lakshmana. But you must not forget that the efforts of the lord Raghava and enthusiasm of our Majesty Sugriva can bear fruit only through the wifely loyalty and devotion of the lady Sita. Words are too poor to give expression to the devotion that fills my heart towards her.

It may occur to you to say 'Well then, how is it that the wretch Ravana still counts himself among the living even after he had laid violent hands upon that lady of boundless might?' Do you know that the king of *rakshasas* spent thousands of years in stern *tapas* such as could not be even dreamt of by others; and as a reward is endowed with limitless might and valour and splendour. It is nothing to him to throw his shield over the countless worlds and keep them from harm and evil. And should he give way to a fit of anger, those very worlds would crumble to dirt. This is why he has laid his foul hands upon Sita and yet is not consumed to ashes. But I would not have you conclude that her wifely devotion has been barren. She has but to give vent to a slight feeling of indignation and the Fire of Destruction pales before it. Her lord and husband is there to take care of her; and she would take upon herself nothing unless he so winks it. She would have her husband crowned with the fame and glory of the slayer of Ravana; and she would go through untold dangers and difficulties to bring it about. I see no other motive.

Now I have rendered you a faithful report of my mission. Should Jambavan and the other elders decide that we should present ourselves before Rama and Lakshmana with Sita, I heartily agree to it. Allow me to submit that I, alone and unaided can make short work of Ravana, his Lanka and the *rakshasa*-creation; and this before the eye has time to wink. But I know full well that you are heroes strong beyond count, unmatched in spirit and courage, masters of every weapon known to man, god or *asura,* resolved to win and fail not. Now if I should elect to work with you, it is useless to speculate about the result. It is but child's play to me to destroy, single-handed, this Ravana and his brothers, his sons, his followers and his armies. I will shatter the magic weapons shot by Indrajit that none other can even raise his eyes to the weapons of Brahma, Indra, Vayu, Varuna and the other gods. I am mighty enough to confuse the heart of Indrajit. A never-ceasing downpour of rocks from my hand is enough to wipe out even the celestial hosts from the face of the universe. And these *rakshasas* are nowhere before me, need I say it. I wait for a word from you to deal death to them and all in sport as it were. Now the oceans may flood the world; Meru, the mountain may tremble on its seat; but who has ever heard of any foe or foes that could disturb the equanimity of our venerable Jambavan on the field of battle. Again this, our prince, the first born of Vali is by himself equal to despatch the best and the bravest of the *rakshasa*-heroes to the halls of Death. The speed and the rush of the winds that friek from between the thighs of Panasa and Nila as they course through the sky in their flight, is able to reduce the mighty mountain Meru to a heap of dust. The mountain Manthara will but follow suit. Do you speak of the *rakshasas* in the same breath again. Mainda and Dvivida, the matchless twins, the sons of the Lord of fire have never yet come across any one that could stand up to them, among the orders of gods, *asuras, yakshas, gandharvas, uragas* and *garudas.* No one has yet measured their might. Find me their equals in all the worlds. The lord Brahma has granted them the boon of boundless strength and energy. Have they not drunk of the waters of immortality? In the far past, Brahma wanted to please the gods *asvins* and granted them the boon. "These know not death at any time from any hands." It was enough to fill their hearts with pride; they destroyed the armies of the gods and wrested from them the heavenly ambrosia to drink thereof. Take your case, here, every one of you. These two have but to get excited and Lanka and everything it holds, is gathered to the past. I have done somewhat towards that. The guardian deity of the town has been vanquished. The major portion of it has been burnt to ashes. The names of our lords, Rama and Lakshmana and of myself their humble servant have been shouted along the high roads of the city and made a word of terror to the *rakshasas*. I roared out to them this message. "Neither in strength, nor in prowess, nor in might has the world seen the equal of my lords Raghava and Lakshmana and of Sugriva over whom they have extended the shadow of their protection." It is still ringing in their ears, my words of defiance. "I am the messenger of the lord Raghuvira of the royal line of the Kosalas. Hanuman am I known to the world. I am the first born of the lord Vayu."

I will recall to you the fact, that the daughter of the royal sage Janaka, sits in despair at the foot of the *simsupa* tree in the *asoka* grove of Ravana. Dim and dull even as the moon behind cloud-banks, hemmed in by cruel *rakshasis,* gulfed in the depths of sorrow and grief, the bare earth is her bed. Yet she counts as nothing that Ravana, so haughty and so terrible in his pride, endowed with matchless grace of form and feature, that paragon of wives is cast in durance vile by Ravana. The beloved daughter of Janaka, the royal sage, the head and fountain of everything good and auspicious, she leads a miserable life there, with her heart full of the thought of her husband, even like the lady Sachi torn away from the hands of her lord Indra. Her hopes and joys are all centred in him. Clad in but a single garment, her lovely hair woven in one shapeless braid, her fair form covered with dust and dirt, lean and emaciated from grief and privation, she expects with an eager heart, the moment when her lord's arms will be crowned with victory. 'Will the time ever come when my lord will deal to Ravana the death he so richly deserves? Will I ever see the hour strike for the deliverence from my grief and sorrow and misery?' I saw with these eyes the frightful *rakshasis* taunt, insult and threaten her in her lonely home in the *asoka* grove. Single- braided, despondent, her heart ever with Rama, dull of hue, the bare earth her only seat, she presents to me the appearance of a lovely pool of lotuses black-scorched, wan and ugly through the cruel autumn heats. Ravana ceases not his prayers, his entreaties, his persuasions; but her heart never inclines towards him in the least. Resolved to quit her hold on life, she casts looks of appeal on all sides like unto a frightened fawn; and these eyes beheld her in that plight. It was no light work for me to make her confide in me. I had speech of her and acquainted her with everything that took place after she was taken to Lanka. It gave her joy to hear of the friendship between Raghava and Sugriva. She stays her hands from Ravana though his offence towards her is something awful; and it is because she is a devoted wife to lord Rama and it would dim the bright wifely loyalty with which she is crowned. And Ravana may count it as the result of his past good deeds. So our lord Raghava must deal death unto him and no other. The lady Sita is but the distant cause of it. When I come to think of the strength, the might and the *tapas* of Ravana, I am certain that the lord Raghava will slay him using the lady Sita but as a means to the end. Slight of form by nature, the lady Janaki has grown leaner yet, like unto the learning of him who recites the sacred word on the first day of the fortnight. Now I have laid before you as faithfully as I can, a picture of the grief and the misery that she is going through every moment, it is upon you to seek the means to put an end to them."

CHAPTER 60

THE COUNSELS OF ANGADA

THEN spake out Angada, "Hanuman, it is he that has come upon the whereabouts of Sita; and it is all unmeet that we should seek the presence of the lord Rama without him. I do not hold with you when you say that we have knowledge of where the lady is; but have not brought her with us; I know it is your valour and prowess that impels you to do so. Have we, as yet, met our equal among the gods or the *asuras,* or in the countless worlds above and below, in taking long flights across this sky or in giving battle to our foes. Here, the best and the bravest of the *rakshasas* have been destroyed by our Hanuman. What yet remains for us to do? I am for going back with the lady Sita."

Then Jambavan, wise in counsel and hoary with age, spoke most lovingly to Angada. "My son! Your counsel is good and agreeable; but I think we should so act as is consonant to the views and purpose of Raghava and in such a way that his object is not frustrated."

CHAPTER 61

THE MONKEYS IN THE GROVE OF HONEY

ANGADA, Hanuman and the other monkeys, found the counsel of Jambavan good and sound. Then with Anjaneya their head, they coursed through the skies from the mountain Mahendra with glad hearts. Huge of form, terrible of might, they passed darkening the firmament even as the mountain Meru and the Mandara or lordly elephants in their rut. Their fond looks and admiring glances bore lightly aloft as it were, Maruti, lauded by all creation for his matchless strength, courage and speed. Bent upon bringing victory and fame to the arms of the lord Raghava, proud and haughty at the thought of having accomplished their mission successfully, they were all eager to carry the glad news to their lord Raghava. They were spoiling for a fight with the *rakshasas* in Lanka. They would not fail to assist their king Sugriva in rendering back the help and favour he had received at the hand of Raghava; for, they were noble of heart and boundless in their gratitude. After some hours they came to a wood, bright with trees, shrubs, creepers and flowers, rivalling in beauty the garden of Indra. It was the object of wonder to all creatures who long to roam there for ever. But it was guarded most vigilantly by Sugriva and none dare approach it. Dadhimukha the uncle of Sugriva, was deputed to keep watch over it and a large army to assist him.

The sight of it excited the monkey-hosts who cried to Angada "Pray give us leave to drink of the honey therein." He consulted Jambavan and the other elders and replied "Feast yourselves to your hearts' content."

Thereupon the monkeys shouted for sheer joy. Some leaped about; some sang themselves hoarse; some danced about; some simply fell on the ground and rolled; some saluted others; some gravely promenaded the glades; some laughed in glee; some took flying leaps here and there; some raved stupidly; some fell upon each others' shoulders in fond embrace; some jumped upon one another; some took themselves into secret places to talk undisturbed; some played with one another; some leapt from tree to tree; some jumped down from the tops of trees; some jumped up to the tops of trees; one was singing all to himself when another drew near him laughing as if mad; one was laughing all to himself when another drew near him weeping most dolefully. Then another approached him with words of high command; thereat another shouted to him to hold off. Thus did the monkey-myriads spread themselves through the wood drinking their fill of honey, mad, intoxicated and entirely off their balance. None of them there was but inebriated or happy. They crashed down lofty trees; they shook them bare of leaves; then scattered the flowers all around. They took enormous draughts of honey and made sad havoc of the beautiful forest. Then Dadhimukha, the guardian thereof, grew wroth and essayed to keep them back. But the monkey-lords threatened him with terrible punishment. He was no mean warrior, this Dadhimukha and would be loyal to his trust. So he persuaded some, he rebuked others, he set some others against one another and dealt severely with others, thereby endeavouring to put a stop to the work of destruction begun by them. The monkeys strong and proud in their strength were now entirely beside themselves with drink and lost all memory of their king Sugriva or his deputy Dadhimukha. They clean forgot that he was the uncle of their master and it was treason to obstruct him in the discharge of his duty. They closed round him, insulted him most wildly, threw him about, tore him with their claws, bit him with their sharp teeth, pounded him with their iron fists, kicked him most cruelly and finished their work of destruction most thoroughly.

CHAPTER 62

DADHIMUKHA AND THE MONKEYS

AND Hanuman shouted out to them, "Friends! Leave black care and fear behind you; take your fill of the honey, the fruits and everything you find here. I take it upon myself to prevent any one from disturbing you."

Then Angada mightily pleased with himself roared out his orders, "Friends! Stay not your hands from the honey you find here. The words of Maruti who has come back to us crowned with success are a law unto us; and it is our bounden duty to see it is carried out. You need no persuasion towards that."

The monkeys raised a shout of good; and like a mighty river in full flood, spread themselves over the honey-grove. They were mightily excited at meeting Hanuman after his long and dangerous journey; they had news of Sita and gladdened their heart. Their prince Angada had given them leave to do as they would. They waxed haughty and furious at being checked; they made light of the guardian of the grove; they ate and drank to their hearts' content of the fruits and honey therein. The guards tried to stay them and were driven out with blows and kicks and curses.

Some drank honey out of leaf cups; some in sheer wantonness threw the honey upon others; some drank it and hit others with the squeezed combs; some painted others with wax; some had drunk more than was good for them and supported themselves against the trunks of lofty trees; some threw themselves on the earth in leafy corners; some spread couches of soft leaf and slept themselves; some struck at one another mad with drink and out of sheer gladness; some laid bets as to who would leap farthest; some roared like mighty lions; some simply yelled and shrieked and shouted as if they could not contain themselves; some lay in drunken sleep all unconscious of the uproar; some laughed at something they did; they knew not what; some others watched them and tried to imitate them; some boasted of something they did, they cared not to remember what; and others said unto themselves that might be improved upon.

The guards set there by Dadhimukha were routed by the monkeys and sought the presence of their master. "Lord! The monkeys have entered our honey-grove and are wasting it most atrociously. We did our best to keep them back. They hit us; they chased us about; they caught our feet and threw us aloft into the sky. And it is Hanuman who has given them leave to do so."

Dadhimukha was beside himself with wrath at this report. He comforted his men and said, "Come with me. We and our troups will drive out these mischievous monkeys, that have dared to enter our grove and lay violent hands upon it."

Then Dadhimukha and his guards came in with trees, stones and blocks; and fell upon the monkeys disporting themselves there. Hanuman and his friends saw them coming against them and sprang to meet them. Dadhimukha mighty in his strength, tore up a lofty tree and struck at them. Angada blind with intoxication could not make out Dadhimukha, a reverent elder of his family. He hit him with his fists, kicked him down and pounded him upon the earth into a shapeless mass. The poor guardian of the forest had his arms broken; his legs were no better; he was deluged with blood and lay for a while in a dead faint. Very soon he came back to himself and blind with fury struck about him most lustily with huge trees at the monkeys he found drinking from the trees. But he had hard work to free himself from their grasp. So he betook himself to a lonely spot and said to his men, "Well, let these wretches, remain here; I will speed to where the lords Rama and Sugriva abide. I will make Angada pay for all this. And Sugriva in his black anger will pass his word to slay the monkeys thereabouts. For, this honey-grove has been till now unapproached by the very gods. It is very dear to the heart of our king. It has come down to him from the far past and it is matchless in beauty and loveliness. He will make short work of these drunken monkeys and their followers. It is but just that they should die a cruel death who had dared to cross the orders of the king. And all that we suffered at their hands will not go in vain."

Then he lost no time and his guards with him, but coursed through the air and stood before his Majesty Sugriva before the eye had time to wink.

They beheld Rama, Lakshmana and with them Sugriva and came down; they clasped their palms over their heads and laid themselves at the feet of king Sugriva with woeful looks.

CHAPTER 63

DADHIMUKHA COMPLAINS

WHEREAT Sugriva was sore afraid and full of apprehension as to what evil had happened, exclaimed "Monkey-hero! Pray you arise. I wonder that you should throw yourself at my feet and you, whom nothing has shaken till now. Let me know what has happened. Rest sure I will put away the fear from your heart."

Dadhimukha, of no mean intelligence, was somewhat consoled at this and arose saying, "The late majesty, your father Riksharajas and your late lamented brother, Vali and yourself after them, have never allowed any other to make free with the honey-grove, is it not? Now your monkeys have forced their way into it; my guards tried to keep them back; they made light of it and took their fill of the fruits and the honey therein and waste more. Any attempt to restrain their mischief is replied by an angry stare and fiery looks; nay, my men have been woefully handled and driven from the grove. They smote some with their hands; they hit some with their fists and in ease; they dragged others along the earth; they whirled others round and round with their feet and threw them in the sky. Thus and many a wise have they blackened our faces and injured us most grievously. Nay, they have dared to clean forget themselves and their king. Your honey-grove is now at their sweet will and pleasure; and all this while your majesty rules over us."

Then Lakshmana turned to Sugriva and said, "Pray let me know who this monkey-warrior is. I guess he is some guardian of the forest. What has brought him here? What unpleasant news does he bring you with such a woe- begone countenance?"

And to him replied Sugriva, "Lakshmana! Angada and his search party that proceeded south have forced their way into my honey-grove and are, as Dadhimukha this warrior reports to me, making themselves mighty jolly over the fruits and the honey therein. They dare not do so unless they have achieved their object; they would not touch the honey; they dare not lay violent hands on the wood. Hence they have accomplished the purpose of their mission. Doubtless, they have discovered the whereabouts of the lady Sita. Again, it needs no saying that it was Hanuman that did it and no other. For, it is clean beyond others to achieve. He is the repository of successful accomplishment, keen intellect, untiring effort, valour, wisdom and many other excellences; Jambavan to counsel; and Angada to lead; and Hanuman to protect them; how could it be otherwise than that their quest is successful? They are beside themselves with joy and are making free with the honey in my grove. Dadhimukha, my uncle and his guards tried to keep them back, but were kicked out. And he has come to us with that gladdest of news. Lakshmana! Mighty warrior! *we have come at the whereabouts of lady Sita. Take my word for it.* That is why our monkeys are holding high revel in my honey-grove. They have overstepped the time I gave them; with an unsuccessful mission, they dare not even dream of raising their eyes to the honey-grove that has been made a present to my father Riksharajas by the lord Brahma and that I hold dear to myself, even as the light of my eyes."

The words of Sugriva fell upon the ears of Rama and Lakshmana like the sweet waters of life; they quenched the raging fires of grief in their hearts and made them dance with joy. Then Sugriva turned to Dadhimukha with glad looks and said, "Uncle! Angada and the other monkeys have successfully accomplished their mission and in consequence, have, in a transport of joy, forced their way into the honey-grove and are disporting themselves. It is pleasing to me. It is upto me to forgive this offence on the part of those that have come back crowned with success. And I have forgiven them accordingly. All eager are we, Rama, Lakshmana and myself to behold Hanuman and the warriors, over whom he shines like the morning sun, to hear from their lips their account of how they came upon the lady Sita."

Then he turned his looks on Rama and Lakshmana whose faces were bright with joy and whose eyes beamed with delight. Their hair stood on end and their forms swelled as it were, magnificently.

The monkey-lord was beside himself with joy that but echoed the feelings of his friends and concluded that the dearest wishes of their hearts were already realised.

CHAPTER 64

THE MONKEYS MEET SUGRIVA

THUS ordered by Sugriva, Dadhimukha and his men saluted most joyfully Rama, Lakshmana and their king, and coursing through the sky with the speed of thought landed in the honey-grove. There they beheld the monkeys slowly throwing off their intoxication; they had digested the honey they had drunk and were throwing streams of urine all about. Dadhimukha went up to them all respectfully and addressed himself to Angada in pleasant accents, "My dear boy! I pray you forgive my guards who, through anger and ignorance tried to keep you back. You are our lord, our heir-apparent, you are mightier than the mighty; I pray you once more to forgive the offence committed by these out of sheer ignorance; I see no blame to lay upon you. I just now took word to your uncle that you and your followers were here. He showed not the slightest displeasure at the report of your coming here, at your forcing your way into this honey-grove and of your making free with it. Nay, strangely enough the news gladdened him mightily. He passed this order to me, "Despatch to me in no time the monkeys now in your grove."

The sweet words of Dadhimukha put joy and courage into the hearts of Angada who addressed himself to his followers and said, "Bravest of monkeys! I take it that the lord Rama has word of our doings here. So it becomes us not to delay here, now that we have accomplished our purpose and carried out their orders. Our friends have drunk their fill of honey and rested themselves for a while. So what yet remains for us but to seek the presence of our masters. But I abide by your counsel. It pleases me to carry out your united purpose though I am your heir-apparent, but it is not in my heart to order you. You have crowned your efforts with success and it behoves me not to treat you with disrespect. So we stay here or go forward as you decide."

Thereat the monkeys shouted themselves hoarse with joy and cried, "Lord and master! We may go far and see none that could take his place by your side. And you, our prince and the lord of countless myriads of monkeys, speaking to us so humbly and so kindly, these words befit you and no other. Men as a rule, grow tall with pride of power and wealth and spread themselves over the world leaving no place for any other. This lowliness of heart that graces you now is but an index of your future greatness and glory. We are ready to proceed to the presence of his Majesty Sugriva; but it is not in us to move a finger without your orders thereto. Nay, this is no courtier's flattery but solid truth."

And Angada approved of their decision. Then the monkeys sprang into the air crying 'Let us start' and like blocks of stone shot out from huge catapults, they hid the sky and followed Angada roaring on the way like huge cloud-banks lashed with storms. Meanwhile the slight delay that ensued brought back grief to the bright eyes of Rama. Sugriva noticed it and cried, "Raghuvira! May everything good and great be with you. Calm your troubled heart. Doubt it not that the lady Sita has been come at. My monkeys dare not return long after the limit I set them. Know you not that Angada my son and heir-apparent and no mean warrior himself, will not come back to us unless his mission is successfully carried out. Had they destroyed the honey-grove after a vain quest, Angada would tremble in his skin and pale with fear. It was given to my father by the lord Brahma; he and Vali have guarded it most carefully; and would any one dare to lay violent hands upon it? Rama! Sita has been found. It is now that the name Rama befits you, he that brings delight and joy to the hearts of all creation. Care and anxiety have slipped away from you like a dark cloak; and joy and delight boundless have taken their place. Sita has been found and your life-breaths are now past danger. It is only now and on this day that I can say without the slightest fear of contradiction, that the lady Kausalya gave birth to a most excellent son. It is only today that all the *tapas,* the vows and the penances and rites you have observed till now, have borne golden fruit. Grieve not my lord. I say again, my men have come at the lady Sita. And it is Hanuman that has done so. And I see none other that could have done it. Light and heat and life are by nature inherent in the sun and know no bounds. Even so, success, intelligence, energy and valour find their place in Hanuman most brightly. How could it be otherwise than a perfect success, when Jambavan is there to counsel and Angada to lead; and hence you may take it that the dearest wishes of your heart are crowned with success, for, your might and valour know no bounds. You have chosen a most unlikely time to give expression to your grief."

By that time the monkeys that were despatched to the south drew near. They were tall with pride since their Hanuman had come at the lady Sita and they roared as they came, as if announcing the success of their mission. Then Sugriva was beside himself with joy; his hair stood on end and he waved aloft his mighty tail. Then the monkey-heroes led by Angada and Hanuman, came there, all eager to bless themselves with the sight of Rama. They clean forgot themselves in their joy and alighted upon the earth right before Sugriva, Rama and Lakshmana.

Then Hanuman laid himself at the feet of his king, Rama and Lakshmana and addressed himself to Raghava, "Lord! *Seen have I* the lady Sita. No danger threatens her; her wifely loyalty shines brighter than ever." Now assured of the success of their wishes, Sugriva and Lakshmana looked long and fondly at Hanuman that stood before them. But no word could describe the joy that rose in the heart of Raghuvira.

CHAPTER 65

NEWS OF SITA

THUS the monkeys took their way to Mount Prasravana led by Angada. They saluted Rama and Lakshmana and proceeded to render their report of the lady Sita. They spoke all together. "The lady Janaki is held in durance vile in the harem of Ravana. Cruel *rakshasis* terrorise her. Her heart is ever loyal to you. Ravana has granted her a respite."

Assured of the safety of Sita, Rama said unto them, "Monkeys! Where is she, my Sita? How is her heart towards me? Speak to me at length." Then they put forward Hanuman to reply to Rama; for, he and he alone, has had speech with her in person. Then, Anjaneya turned to where Sita was and saluted her most reverently and proceeded to place before Rama most skilfully the report of his mission.

"I left my friends on the hither shores of the ocean and lightly crossed the hundred *yojanas* of watery waste that lay before me. I was resolved at any cost to come upon the lady. I reached the other shore and made my way into Lanka, the capital of the wicked Ravana, and searched it through and through. At last I found that the lady Sita was confined in a park of his harem. There did I find her in the *asoka* grove, closely guarded by the *rakshasis* and patiently enduring their taunts and insults and cruelties, but with her heart and love ever centered in you. Most loyal of wives and all unmeet to bear the touch of grief or misery, the lady Sita your well beloved, is now in the *asoka* garden, her hair twined in a single braid and the bare earth her only bed. She is gulfed in the sea of misery and despairs of any relief from it. Like unto the pool of lotuses touched with the cruel hands of autumn heat, she is wan and faded of hue. Ravana tries his best to turn her heart away from you and towards himself. But she would have nothing to do with him even in thought. Her heart shrines you and none other. She was about to quit her hold upon life when I came upon her. She heard me narrate the greatness and glory of the royal line of Ikshvaku; and her heart gradually came to confide in me. I had speech with her thereafter and acquainted her with everything that happened meanwhile. It delighted her extremely to hear that you have made friends with his majesty Sugriva. Her behaviour is most praise-worthy and excellent; her love and devotion to you knows no bounds. Most mighty is she and of stern vows. My tongue falters when I essay to put in words her reverence and love to you.

Most mighty of intellect! She bade me tell you as a sign of recognition, an incident that occurred in connection with a crow when you abode at the mount Chitrakuta. 'Son of Vayu! I trust you to carry faithful report to Rama of everything that you saw here. Again remind him of the fact that when we lived in the forest of Dandakas it chanced one day that my *tilaka* in the forehead slipped away and my lord replaced it by one of the mountain ore. Tell him to recall this incident most carefully. I have sent to him this jewel through you. Most jealously have I kept it. My heart found relief in my grief of separation from you whenever I chanced to look at it. And that sole refuge have I sent back to you. I keep my hold upon life but for the space of one short month. I live not beyond that, tortured as I am every moment by these cruel *rakshasis*. Carry these words of mine to Rama when he is with Sugriva. And hand him this jewel of mine.'

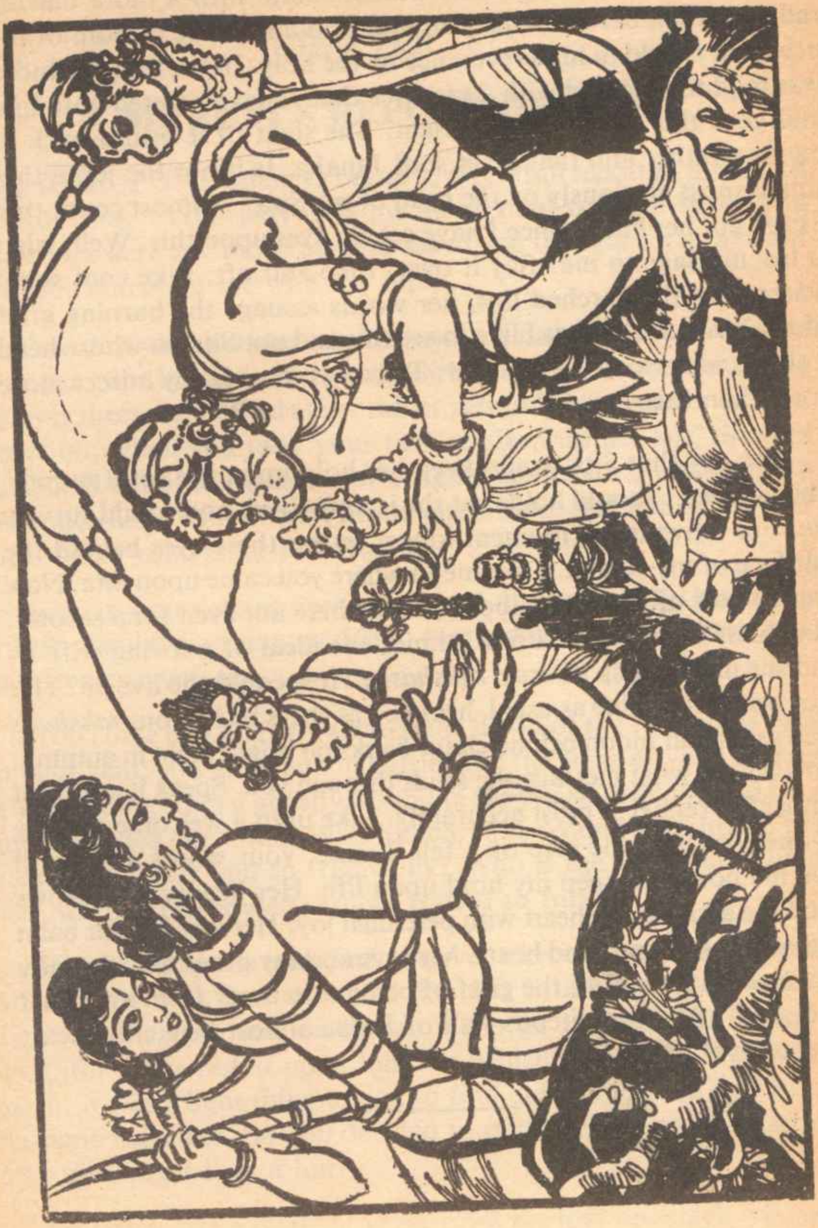
In the depths of the harem of Ravana, frightened to death like a fawn in the grasp of tigers, wan and weak from the grief of having been torn away from your arms, yet she preserves most perfectly her wifely purity and loyalty of heart. And this is what she has sent me to speak to you. I have placed before you some report of all that took place during my quest. At any cost it is up to us to take measures to cross the sea and proceed to Lanka where the lady Sita is."

Thus did Maruti describe most ably and most faithfully and most touchingly how he found Sita in her grief. Rama and Lakshmana, he knew, had put away care and sorrow from them somewhat and had found comfort in his words. Then he most humbly placed in the hands of Rama, the crest-jewel that Janaki had entrusted him with, as a sign of recognition.

CHAPTER 66

"WHAT IS HER MESSAGE?"

THUS did Hanuman render report of his mission and hand over the jewel entrusted to him by Sita. Thereat Raghuvira clasped it to his breast, devoured it with eyes beaming with love and affection and old memories crowding upon him, he gave way to sorrow. Hot tears dimmed his eyes and he could not get a view of the precious jewel. So he turned to Sugriva and said, "Friend! My heart melts at the sight of this ornament, even as the cow streams forth milk at the sight of its calf. At the time of our marriage, my father took this from Janaka and gave it to adorn the fair tresses of Sita. And



her mother did so. Then this trinket shone with a more blazing radiance than before. This gem had its home at the bottom of the ocean. It is held in high reverence by the holy. In the far past Indra was mightily pleased with a sacrifice that Janaka offered unto him and gave this to him as a present. The sight of it brings back to me, my father and that great soul Janaka. Is it not the jewel that shines most gloriously on the head of my Sita? I almost count that I have got her back, since I have set my eyes upon this. Well, what is her message to me? Say it over, time and oft. Like cool sweet water unto the parched lips, her words assuage the burning grief of my heart. Alas! that I live to see this and not Sita on whose head it shone when we were together. Tell me if there is any misery more cruel than this.

You say that Sita would keep her hold upon life for a month. Then indeed I should hold that she is long-lived, and would survive me. For I live not a moment longer unless these eyes behold the fair face of my Janaki. Take me to where you came upon Sita. Now that I know of her whereabouts, I stay here not even for a second. Matchless in beauty, natural, timid, the ideal of a loving wife — and she in the grasp of cruel *rakshasis!* How could she live on? Her face would not shine as usual, hemmed as she is by hideous *rakshasis* even as the fair moon behind cloud-banks on bright night in autumn. Now tell me what message she sends through you. Speak it out most faithfully; render it most accurately. Like unto a welcome remedy to one that is in the grip of a fell disease, your words alone will give me power to keep my hold upon life. Her beauty ever grows upon me and fills my heart with perennial joy. Her words pour balm and nectar into my fond heart. My love and my other self, the lady Sita now tortured with the grief of being torn away from me, what said she?" And the piteous wail of Rama almost broke the heart of the loyal Maruti.

CHAPTER 67

MARUTI'S REPORT OF SITA

THEREUPON, Anjaneya began to give a full report of his search for Sita. "Your lady gave me an account of what befell you when you were at Chitrakuta and asked you to regard it as a proof that she entrusted me with her reply.

One day you and she were enjoying a nap in a lovely spot in the open. She happened to get up earlier. Then a crow chanced to fly over there and pecked at her rather painfully between her breasts. Later on, when you took your turn to sleep on her lap, the bird came and annoyed her as before. Again and again it ran its sharp beak into her soft flesh; the blood gushed out and falling on your face, woke you rather rudely.

Even in your deepest sleep, you could, if you so willed blast your foes to absolute nothing; and Sita, overcame with the intense pain, had to rouse you up.

You come of a line of warriors; the blood of the Ikshvakus runs in your vein; you are a lion in battle; and the sight of your darling wife bleeding from a ghastly wound in the breast drove you to fury and you cried out "Sita! Who has dared to wound you thus in the breast so cruelly and so frightfully? Who is the idiot that would play with a five-headed serpent roused to fury?"

He cast his eyes around and observed a crow a little way in front of him, his beak and talons all dabbled with blood. And it was Jayanta, the only son of Indra. When he noticed that Rama's wrathful looks rested upon him, he vanished into the bowels of earth. It was a light thing to you to find out who he was and what he came there for. So you decided to punish him cruelly, that he may not forget it in a hurry.

You drew out a blade of grass from the mat on which you sat and charged it with the terrible force of the Brahmastra. The messenger of wrath chased him with tongues of curling flame.

Then, the miscreant sought the protection of his father, his mother, the gods and the great saints, but to be driven out with curses by one and all of them. Through the three worlds he flew again and again; but there was none to waste a thought of pity on him. So he even came back to you and fell at your feet, crying for mercy and pardon. And you put away death from him; for you are the saviour and protector of the myriad worlds and all they hold. It was a law you had made unto yourself that you will give peace and happiness to those that seek your protection; and this caitiff, Jayanta was the son of that Indra, whom one of your ancestors Kakutstha went over to help against the demons of darkness. Hence, in your infinite mercy, you clean forgot that he had done you cruel wrong and richly deserved death as the mildest punishment. But, the *Brahmastra* may not return with an empty hand; and you made the criminal, part with one of his eyes to satisfy the great law. Then he poured forth his heart in grateful thanks to you and your noble father and hied back to his home on high, sadder and wiser.

The mysteries of all the *astras,* human, infernal and divine is an open book to you and to no other. Your strength and valour know no bounds. You are the flower of chivalry, the ideal hero. The traditions of your royal race find in you their best and noblest exponent. Then what stays your hand from letting loose that *Brahmastra* upon these wicked *rakshasas?* The countless worlds resound with your glory as one whom the embattled hosts of *nagas, gandharvas, asuras* and *maruts* dare not face in battle dire. If he possesses in himself but a spark of valour, if he feels the faintest desire to see me again and hold me in his arms, then let him drink the heart-blood of Ravana with his sharp and cruel arrows.

Well, what prevents his brother Lakshmana, from asking his permission to rescue me from this miserable captivity. For, he is endowed with matchless might and would brook no insult to his honour. Those noblest of men resemble the Lords of air and fire in their splendour and strength; the very gods slink away before them; nothing is impossible to them; then, why do their arms hang powerless and idle in my case? Nay, on deeper thought, it seems to me that I am guilty of some unspeakable and unpardonable crime that makes these princes of boundless resource and all consuming might, careless and unsympathetic in my case.'' And a flood of bitter tears blinded her eyes and choked her utterance.

But I hastened to reply and put heart into that sorely tired lady. ''Noblest and best of women! It is but the grief of separation from you and nothing else that makes the spirit of Rama dull and listless to any concern of life. And his misery reflects itself a million-fold in the heart of Lakshmana his twin-self. I swear by all that I hold sacred that it is so.''

Well, leave the dead past to bury itself. Am I not here before you at the end of a long and arduous search? And shall pale fear and cruel grief annoy you with their presence a moment longer? You will behold the misfortunes and dangers that left you no peace day or night, draw their last breath and vanish into nothingness this very moment. The noble princes will, in no time, find their way here, all eager and athirst to see your great self and consume this den of iniquity to ashes. Ravana, his sons, kith and kin and followers, shall fall an easy prey to the just wrath of Rama, who will thereupon lead you back on the wings of victory to royal Ayodhya. I give my unbroken word that this shall come to pass. Now give me some sign, some token, some recognition, well-known to my lord and dear to his heart.''

Then, the lady Janaki looked around her cautiously, took this jewel from out of her dresses and gave it to me to deliver it unto your noble self. I received it on your behalf, bowed low unto her and prepared to go back.

Noticing that I expanded my form and was about to set out, the royal lady said to me, with tear-dimmed eyes and broken accents, her heart almost breaking with pain and grief at the thought of what would become of her, should this welcome messenger from her dear lord take himself away from her side, ''Anjaneya! Convey my respectful inquiries to Rama and Lakshmana, the bravest and best of men and to their dear friend the lord Sugriva. On you and you alone, lies the responsibility of lending me a helping hand out of this deep and dark gulf of misery. Spare no words in acquainting Rama with the life I lead here, a prey to the insults and persecutions of these demons. May everything good and auspicious go with you.''

Noblest of monarchs! that royal lady commanded me to deliver myself unto you, all that I reported about my mission; and in sooth, words fail me to give you even the faintest idea of what she is suffering there. And my poor words, must I pray, put it into your heart to take measures that sorrow and misery trouble her no more."

CHAPTER 68

SITA'S SUGGESTIONS

"THANKS to the affection you have shown to me and thanks to the friendship which the Lady Sita has honoured me with. I was treated by her with very great consideration and instructed in the course of action, I was to adopt thereafter. "Rama would do well to lay low Ravana in battle dire and rescue me; carry this, my request to him and add whatever seems to you fit and reasonable. I would, that you abide here a day longer if it does not inconvenience you. You will find many a spot here where you can rest your wearied limbs for a while, all unperceived by the *rakshasas* and take your way back. For, so long as you, the mighty hero, are by my side, the grief that preys upon unfortunate me, night and day, will keep away for an hour or so. Should you go back now, the strain of expecting your return may be too much for me and I may sink under it. Wave after wave of sorrow beats upon my poor defenceless heart and threatens to swamp it. Misery seems to be my only lot in this life of mine; I am afflicted beyond description; and should I be deprived of your presence and company, pain and anguish will mark me as their own.

Let that be; I fear, alas! there is no other that can cross over to this dread isle, except the Lord of the feathered tribe Garuda and the Lord of air and yourself, his darling son and his peer in speech and might. How could they convey themselves across this waste of waters, with its billows mountains high, be it Rama or Lakshmana or the monkey-heroes or their valiant troops ? This dreadful doubt ever sits near my heart and gnaws at it mercilessly. I trust to you of keen sight and endless resource to find me a way out of this maze of difficulty. I doubt not that you and you alone can cross this sea, make short work of Ravana and his cruel hosts, lay this Lanka in ruins and take me back to my lord.

It will be but one more gem in your crown of glory and valour. But Rama owes it to his high and noble ancestry, heroic life, valour and fame, that he should anyhow come here with his countless hosts, deal death to Ravana and his *rakshasas* in dread battle and take me back to Ayodhya. For, Ravana, a coward at heart, took advantage of the absence of my lord and carried me away as a low thief. And Rama cannot in fairness to himself and to the world, take a leaf from the book of the miserable caitiff. The prince of heroes he, what more fitting and seemly that he should lead his myriads here for all the world to see, exterminate the *rakshasa*-brood root and branch, leave no trace of this den of vice and lead me back to his capital in all the splendour of victory. The boundless universe holds not another that could stand by the side of that incarnate strength, valour and prowess. And it is upto you to see that his fame and glory shine at their best.''

Thus spake she, my lady Sita, in charming modesty with many a reason to clinch her arguments with a world of significant suggestiveness in her words. And to her, I rendered meet reply ''My Queen! Sugriva, the lord of the monkey-world, is mighty beyond description; he allows no one to approach him in valour. And countless millions are ever alert to catch and carry out his slightest wishes; and they are of unthinkable strength, prowess, speed and dauntless energy. They hold their resistless course above, below and all around in this vast universe. Of matchless might of spirit, there is nothing that they cannot take up and achieve. Just for a frolic, in the exuberance of their strength, they have coursed round this globe many a time. Take it from me that each and every one that owns the sway of Sugriva is at least my equal, if not my master and I count myself as the lowest of the low among them. Lo! I have managed to come over here; and why should they not? Kings depute now, but the rank and file on such errands like this and never their bravest and best. Then, why doubt and grieve? Cast it away behind you : From far Kishkindha to this isle, it is but a walk over to them; and the eye has no time to wink before they will be here.

Those lion-like heroes Rama and Lakshmana will sail over here on my broad shoulders like the Lords of the Day and Night. Raghuvira, the terror of his foes and like unto the monarch of the forests in valour and strength will stand at the gates of this island fortress, along with his brother Lakshmana, with their dreadful bows uplifted to slay and spare not. Countless hosts of monkeys, armed with teeth and nails and like unto lions and tigers in strength and fierceness, will darken the sky over Lanka with their huge bodies that tower aloft even as lordly elephants and will range over its hill-slopes, roaring like vast rain-clouds. The lord Raghunatha will bring his voluntary exile in the forests to a close, exterminate his foes and will go back to Ayodhya with you to receive the crown of Ikshvaku that is his by right. These thou shalt live to see, most fortunate of women."

"Thus did I deliver myself in sweet words and majestic, out of a heart surcharged with devotion and affection. The Lady Sita listened to my account of the life of misery you are leading. I saw the daughter of Janaka plunged in deep grief and these very eyes beheld her later on cheer up and take heart."

YUDDHAKANDA

CHAPTER 1

MARUTI'S REWARD

IN this way Hanuman gave to Rama a faithful account of his mission. Raghava looked on him with affection and said to himself, "This watery waste cannot be crossed by any one except Garuda, Vayu and Hanuman. He has done single-handed what the other two could do together. This is no light task. The gods, *danavas, yakshas, gandharvas, uragas* and *rakshasas* dare not approach Lanka; and Ravana, the wicked terror of the worlds, keeps ceaseless watch over it; and who could ever dream of making his way into it?

Nay, who could, trusting solely on his strength, meet and slay the *rakshasa*-warriors there, lay the city in ruins and come back alive? This again is no light task; it baffles even imagination. One might be blessed with boundless strength and valour; but if he were not equal of Hanuman in intellect, he could never hope to find his way into Lanka ever guarded by cruel *rakshasas*. None else could think of it. It cannot be said that Hanuman has discharged the duty of a messenger simply because he had carried out faithfully the orders of his master Sugriva. He has accomplished other deeds as well that are consonant to the chief object of his mission; hence, he has discharged to the full the duty of a messenger.

Envoys fall into three classes. The highest consists of those who carry out faithfully the commands of their master and in addition, such other things as are helpful to the main purpose, out of pure loyalty and devotion, though not definitely directed to do so. The middle class are those who, though able and energetic, omit to carry out what might go to help the main object, simply because they had not their master's orders to do so. The lowest class consists of those who, though skilful and energetic, allow themselves to be diverted and fail to carry out their master's commands. And of those, Hanuman ranks first in the highest class. His conduct proves him such. He has not lost his dignity by being foiled at the hands of his foes. He has carried out the orders of Sugriva to the utmost and he has won the heart of his master by accomplishing other things beneficial to the main purpose.

Nay, he has saved us from falling into unrighteousness and sin and has established firmly the rule of law and right. For, if he had failed to discover Sita, I would lose my hold upon life. And my brothers, my kinsmen, my people at Ayodhya and my friends the monkeys, would also end their lives. Now he has saved us all from the dreadful sin of suicide.

Nay, he has saved the fair fame of all of us before the world, because he has discovered Sita's whereabouts.

My heart breaks as it were, because I cannot make a fit return and give equal pleasure to him who has done so much for us all. It even blots out the joy I feel at the news of Sita's well-being. I am unable to decide which, of all things I have, I should give him as a reward. It would not be enough even if I give him all that is mine. But instead of all this, I shall clasp him fondly to my heart. He desires nothing from me. On the contrary, he does everything to please me. I have long been looking forward to the time when I could recognise his services to me. And now the time has come. No one can say me nay. He has set his heart upon my divine form. And this I should let him have. A blade of grass is a useless gift for him who lives on ambrosia. Should I reward him with all other objects, he would still grieve that I had not blessed him with the one thing he loves. And since in this are contained all objects of desire, to give this is to give every desirable thing in the world.

Again, this form has not come to me, like the bodies of other men, as the result of *Karma*. I took it of my own will as the best in its kind and as the abode of all things, good and auspicious. And I find it so in experience. It gives him that sees it boundless bliss. My form, nature and substance, it is all that I possess.

Further, he discovered Sita as she was about to give up her life; he not only saved her but he brought me news of her and thus saved my life as well.

To one who has rescued two bodies from death, "it is a poor reward to give but one."

Saying this to himself, Sri Rama, with his hair on end with joy, clasped Maruti fondly to his heart.

Then he thought for a while of difficulty and danger of transporting his monkey-hosts over the sea and said, "Sugriva! it is a mighty feat what Hanuman has achieved for us. He has crossed the ocean, made his way into Lanka and discovered Sita in the inner apartments of Ravana. But the joy on hearing the news of Sita is all effaced by the heavy anxiety that weighs me down when I cast my eyes over this watery expanse and the *vanara* army we have to take over it. Seeing the width and depth of the ocean, and the dreadful creatures that make it their home, I know not how the army of monkeys can ever reach the other shore. Until I had news of Sita, it seemed to me the most difficult thing to discover where she was. But now, the crossing of this vast ocean seems an even more difficult task. What shall we do next?"

And he sought counsel of Hanuman and considered many plans from including that of the waters and making a path for the army.

CHAPTER 2

SUGRIVA CHEERS UP RAMA

SUGRIVA could not bear to see Rama sorrowing thus. His affection for Rama was such that he regarded his friend's joys and griefs as his own. "When our friend is struck down by adversity or when he strays into evil ways or delays in doing an important duty, we should give him good advice, if we wish him well, even though he may not seek advice of us!" — the monkey-lord had this at heart when he sought to dispel the grief of Rama. Raghava had been most fondly brought up by King Dasaratha; he was not used to affliction; and he was the source of joy to all beings.

(Kamandaka has it in his book of counsel that purity, liberality, heroism, sharing joys and sorrows, affection, intelligence and truthfulness are the marks of friendship). So Sugriva turned to Rama and said :

"There is no reason why you should yield to sorrow. You should put away from you this despondency that eats into your heart. I see no call for it. Till now we had no news of the lady Sita. This cause for grief has now gone. You can read into the future; you are an adept in the science of polity; you can reason out and infer results from causes and your judgements are sound and based on discrimination. If we take your excellences alone into consideration, there is no reason for you to grieve. I say, cast away from you this evil shadow even as an ascetic would leave behind him thoughts that bar his way to *moksha.*

Have no anxiety how we shall cross these waters. Believe me. We shall, I assure you, pass lightly over this sea, infested though it be, by frightful creatures; we shall enter Lanka and we shall deal death and destruction to our foes.

Now, should you grieve that we have none to help us. Behold these myriads of monkeys, heroes, every one of them, and skilful beyond measure, ready to leap into the fire at your bidding. It is but child's play for them to slay our foes. I read their eagerness from the joy in their radiant faces. And I know from long experience that they are worthy of our trust.

Let that be. Even if one should have grounds for anxiety, is it not one's duty to cast away care? If you yield to care, it would destroy your energy and enthusiasm; and without that enthusiasm, one would become dispirited and heartless; then, one would lose property and power; dangers would threaten us and all our hopes and aspirations turn out but dust and ashes.

Thence, take the steps to throw a bridge over the waters to enter Lanka, deal just death unto Ravana and bring back the lady Sita.

Say not, 'What good would it do us but to have a sight of that city?' The moment that our monkeys catch a glimpse of Lanka, built on the Trikuta mountain, we may take it that Ravana is dead in battle. The city is impregnable to the combined hosts of gods and *asuras,* unless we build a causeway across the waters. Believe me when I say that the enemies' forces are defeated, once we have crossed over to Lanka.

These my monkeys are past masters in battle. They can take what forms they will. Banish from your heart this grievous care that eats away all hopes and aspirations. Care saps one's powers. Nay, cast off this despair and call to your aid your natural energy, courage and enthusiasm.

If you say, 'My grief is about my being torn away from Sita and has nothing to do with this ocean'. I reply that grief and despondency dare not touch great minds like yours, though their aims are obstructed or delayed. You are the best and brightest among men of wisdom. All the *Sastras* and their meaning are an open book to you. Ministers like myself are ready at your service for destroying your foes. In all the three worlds there is none who can face you when you stand bow in hand on the field of battle. Any task entrusted to these *vanaras* will never fail. Very soon you will cross this sea and behold Sita. Hence, enough of grief; entertain in its place anger and energy. A *Kshatriya* devoid of sternness misses his fortune. All beings tremble in the presence of a man of stern command. I entreat you to take counsel with us about the crossing of this dreadful waste of waters. Take it from me that my warriors will put their foes to rout, the moment they set foot on the shores of Lanka. These are veterans, every one of them, and adept at taking any form they will; trees and rocks are their weapons for killing their enemies. It matters not even if there be no causeway across these waters. Somehow, we shall make our way into Lanka and annihilate our foes.

Again, behold these most happy omens in nature; they leave us in no doubt that victory is yours. The joy that wells up from my heart assures me that we have achieved our objects, bridge or no bridge. I have not the shadow of a doubt that you will come back, crowned with bright victory."

CHAPTER 3

LANKA

THUS did Rama in his human aspect feel anxious about crossing the sea and took heart through the words of his friend. It is good diplomacy that a king should acquaint himself thoroughly with the enemies' fortifications, defences, armies and kingdom. And Raghuvira as one who sees into the hearts of things, accepted the advice of Surgriva as useful and reasonable, and turning to Hanuman, said, "Well, it is no great thing for me to lead my troops across the sea. I can build a causeway by the might of my *tapas;* I can dry up the waters by my shafts. But let these things be. Lanka, you said, is impregnable. What are its fortifications like? Tell me clearly about its defences on land, on mountains, on the water and in the forests, the strength of the armies in the town and without; the guards, the walls, the battlements, the moats, the mansions of noblemen and everything else that might be useful for us to know. For, you have carefully noted these points when you were there. Subtle, of intellect, you have a quick perception and a retentive memory, I know. You spoke to me of this once before; but I would like to hear it all again more clearly and in greater detail."

Then Maruti, most skilful of speakers, made reply, "Lord! the defences of Lanka, the guards, the troops, the loyalty of the *rakshasas* to Ravana, the natural advantages of the city, its fertility, its wealth, the military arrangements, the transport, the cavalry, the conveyances and the peculiarities of the sea around, all this will I describe to you as best as I can.

Every one in Lanka is blessed with health, contentment and cheerfulness. Lanka is very extensive. It has countless chariots, horses, lordly elephants and the like. No enemy can approach it. The gates are huge, strong and fitted with iron plates and heavy bolts. The fortress has four gates and they are large and broad and lofty. Curious engines of destruction are placed there to destroy the foes approaching the city, by discharging a never-ceasing shower of arrows and rocks. The gates are further fitted with *sataghnis* —

terrible engines fashioned of strong steel and iron — brizzling with sharp spikes. Mighty *rakshasas* stand ever-ready to use them at the slightest notice. The outer walls of Lanka touch the sky. They are very strong, made of beaten gold and encrusted with gems, corals and pearls. At their feet run moats wide and unfathomable, full of cold water in which crocodiles and other terrible creatures scare away all comers. Huge bridges and draw-bridges are laid over them with many a curious mechanism to work them. Myriads of *rakshasas* are placed on guard at each gate and make it their home. The bridges spanning the moats are drawn up on the approach of foes. Of the four draw-bridges, the northern one is the largest and the strongest and it rests on golden pillars let into the moat. Countless platforms are built all around to accommodate its guards.

Ravana is free from gambling and the other vices, common among kings. War is very nearest his heart. Ever on the alert, he is never tired of training and testing his armies.

Lanka is built on the lofty peaks of mount Trikuta. Its sides are steep and smooth, affording no foothold for any one. The sea, the thick woods, the mount Trikuta, the walls and turrets, the moats and the engines contribute to its defences by water, forest, mountain and man-made fortresses as laid down in military science. Thus the capital of the *rakshasas* is unapproachable to the very gods; it strikes terror into the hearts of the assailants. The fathomless depths of the ocean guard it for a hundred *yojanas* all round. No ships traverse these waters. Lanka is thus cut off from the other parts of the world and completely hidden from observation. Battlements, moats, engines of destruction, well-equipped armies of all and these have further large forces to support them, and every variety of weapon known to man, god or *asura*. In the centre of the city, countless veterans are camped, provided with the best conveyances. Of high ancestry, loyal to the core, and ever honoured by their master, a crore of picked warriors are kept in reserve in the town and strike terror into the hearts of foes.

But, I have done something to smash the draw-bridges. I have filled up the moats. Most of the walls and defences have been laid in ruins by me. I set fire to the city and have reduced by a fourth the strength of the troops. Anyhow we shall cross the seas. Take it that our monkeys will destroy Lanka. Angada, Dvivida, Mainda, Jambavan, Panasa, Nala, Nila and many others will course through the sky to Lanka, pull down the hills, the moats, the gates, the walls and the mansions and lead back the lady Janaki to you. Please give your orders to these heroes. Let us start at an auspicious hour."

CHAPTER 4

THE MARCH

THE humble advice tendered by Anjaneya commended itself to Rama, the mighty one of never-failing prowess, and he said, "Verily, my sharp shafts will scatter to the winds this city you have described. You have my word for it. Sugriva! it seems to me good that we march at this auspicious hour. It is best suited for the purpose. The Sun is high and in the heavens and we can take it that this hour, known as *Abhijit,* will bring victory to our armies. If I set out now, where can Ravana, the thief who stole Sita, go and hide himself? If it is asked what profit is there in marching out without making provision for crossing the waters, I say that a man at the point of death through a terrible poison comes back to life as soon as he touches a drop of the waters of immortality; even so, the moment Sita hears from Trijata and others that I have set out to rescue her, she will resume her hold upon life. But should we waste our time here in prolonged counsels, Sita would give up her life. The asterism, Uttaraphalguni, rules over this day and Hasta takes its place tomorrow. Sugriva! let us gather our forces and be on the march even today. Favourable omens presage victory to us. So, I have a feeling that we shall slay Ravana and bring Sita back. The upper lids of the eyes throb; this foretells victory. Let Nila go in advance with a large force, reconnoitering the road ahead.

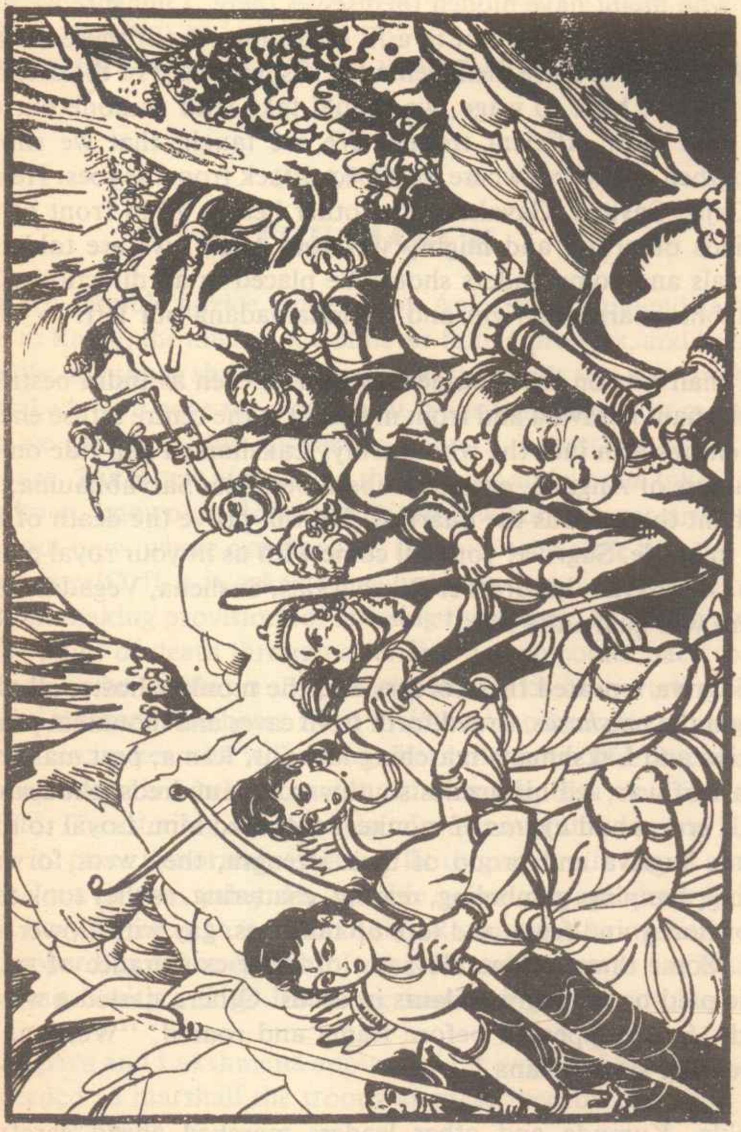
Sugriva and Lakshmana applauded the words of Rama; and he proceeded to marshall the troops as prescribed by the rules.

"Nila! you should lead the troops through cool woods where there is plenty of food like fruits, roots, honey and water. Beware of wicked *rakshasas* poisoning the fruits, roots and water. Have them tested carefully before consuming them. Some of you must go down into the deep valleys and chasms on the way and find any foes who might have hidden themselves there. I am sure we have few among us who are not in a fit condition. But if there are any such, it is best to leave them behind at Kishkindha. For the dreadful war that we have to wage, we should take with us none but our best and most efficient troops. We are taught that we should strengthen our forces where we expect attack from the foes. Hence, let Gaja, Gavaya, Gavaksha and other heroes go in front of the myriads of proud and mighty *vanaras*. Again, we are told that generals and commanders should be placed in all directions. Let Rishabha guard our right and Gandhamadana our left.

I shall ride on the shoulders of Maruti even as Indra bestrides his elephant Airavata and from my place in the centre infuse energy and enthusiasm into the whole army. Lakshmana will ride on the shoulders of Angada, even as Kubera bestrides Sarvabhauma, the elephant that guards the quarters. He will prove the death of our foes in battle. Sugriva! you will come with us in your royal palanquin. Jambavan, his brother Riksharajas, Sushena, Vegadarsi and others will guard the rear."

Sugriva repeated these orders and the monkey-hosts, all afire to fight the *rakshasas,* issued forth from caves and mountain peaks. Sugriva and Lakshmana marching in front, Rama, past master of the art of war, led his armies southwards. Hundreds, thousands, lakhs, crores and *ayutas* of monkeys followed him. Loyal to their master Sugriva and proud of their strength, they went forward leaping, jumping, gamboling, rearing, chattering, as they took their fill of honey and fruits and tore up tall trees, gay with flower and fruit. Some threw others aloft out of sheer exuberance of spirit. Some paid back their assailants in deeds. Others started a war of words. Some appeared before Rama and roared, "We, and we alone, will slay Ravana."

Nila, Kumuda and other leaders marched ahead carefully scanning the country far and wide. Sugriva, Lakshmana and Rama took their places in the centre. Satabali with ten crores of monkeys at his back, kept vigilant over the troops in general. Panasa, Gaja,



Arka and others guarded the left. Sushena, Jambavan and others guarded the troops that marched in the rear of Sugriva. Nila, the Commander-in-Chief, kept an eye over the entire army. Darimukha, Prajankha, Rambha, Rabhasa and others ran about in all directions and hastened the army on the march.

And marching thus, they beheld in the distance the mountain Sahya, dark with woods, and also lakes and pools covered with flowers, and glades and groves. The monkey-host, boundless as the ocean, and striking terror into the hearts of all with their cries, obeyed the strict orders of Rama and kept far away from towns and villages. The *vanara* - heroes often came in front of Rama and gazed fondly at his supernal beauty. Like noble steeds guided by a skilful driver, Maruti and Angada bore Rama and Lakshmana who blazed like the Sun and the Moon in conjunction with Venus and Jupiter.

Thus did Raghuvira, attended by Sugriva and Lakshmana, march southwards with the monkey-hosts.

Then Lakshmana, an adept in the science of omens and supremely resourceful, felt that his heart's wishes were already realised and said to his brother, "I see that your plans will be crowned with success. I read it from the signs on the earth and the sky. We shall rescue the lady Sita; we shall slay Ravana in battle; we will return to Ayodhya and receive a royal welcome from our subjects there. The wind blows from behind upon our armies, soft, pleasant, bracing and auspicious. Birds and beasts make sweet full-throated noises. The quarters are clear and bright. The sun shines in all his lustre. Venus is behind you. The ruler thereof, supremely wise in the sacred lore, is beneficial to you and untouched by maleficent planets. The seven *rishis* (the Great Bear) have passed the South. Trisanku, one of the most illustrious of the line of Ikshvaku, shines bright and clear in the company of Maharshi Vasishtha, the *guru* of our royal race. The two stars in the constellation of Visakha blaze on high, untouched by evil planets. The constellation Moola is ruled by the god Nairruti and guides the destinies of the *rakshasas*. It is now on fire by the touch of the comet near it. All these presage the destruction of the *rakshasas*. The stars that rule those whose death is near are in the grip of evil planets. But the waters are clear and sweet to us; fruits and roots abound in the woods we pass through. The trees are crowned with seasonal flowers and fruits. Our armies shine with enthusiasm and energy, even like the celestial hosts at the time of the great Taraka war. Think of all this and be cheerful.

Then the monkey-hosts marched on, hiding from view the earth and the sky. The dust raised by the hands and the feet of bears and monkeys blotted out the sun's rays and darkened all the earth. Like cloud-banks in the rainy season, the army moved forward hiding mountains and forests from view. Rivers, lakes, cataracts, woods, peaks, plains they traversed; they passed through well-watered spots and forests teeming with fruits, climbed over wooded mountains and spread themselves over level grounds.

Every one of them was full of joy and cheerfulness; they were like the God of Air in speed. And in the service of Rama, their strength and might grew apace. Some marched on very fast through exuberance of strength and exultation and youth; some took flying leaps; some raised an eternal chatter; some waved their tails aloft and brought them down upon the ground with thunderous force; some smashed lofty trees and huge blocks with their hands and feet; some climbed the tops of high mountains and roared from their perch; some imitated the lion's roar; some cut through strong and thick creepers by the force of the wind that rushed between their thighs. Some yawned in the pride of their strength and played with trees and blocks of stone throwing them and catching them lightly. Hundreds, thousands, myriads, lakhs and crores, they covered the entire earth from view. Thus marched on, by day and night, the monkey array led by Sugriva. Every one of them, eager to deliver Sita from her captivity, marched on as fast as he could without wasting a single minute.

Then, as they passed the mountains Sahya and Malaya, wooded with trees of various hues, Rama and Lakshmana beheld huge forest trees tossed by strong winds and scattering their flowers over large blocks of stone. Dark groves came into view where bees hummed in glee over the streams of honey. Cool, gentle breezes blew from the hills, which were decorated with ores of varied hue. The monkey-hosts were coated thick with their dust carried by gales from deep rock-clefts. On the hill slopes blooming cactus and acacia presented a gay appearance. The monkeys wrought sad havoc among them as they passed along. Here and there came to view high grounds dotted with pools, and lakes on which waterfowls of infinite variety sailed gaily, while their banks teemed with boars, wolves, tigers, lions, elephants and other wild beasts. Birds of various plummage filled the sides of the mountains with their sweet warble. The monkeys dived, swam and sported in the cool waters; they raced up the hill slopes and jumped from lofty places; they hailed one another with wild laughter; others took their fill of sweet fruits, roots and flowers; yet others drank deep of the honey that flowed from the trees, some crashed through tall trees, tore off thick creepers and reduced to dust the crests of mountains; some, in intoxication, took flying leaps from tree to tree; yet others fell down to the earth. In fact, there was not even a pin-point of space left uncovered. Like a field shining with golden harvest, the whole country was literally paved with them.

Then Rama came to mount Mahendra. Eager to have a view of the ocean, his eyes brightened as he strode up to the lofty peak and beheld, stretched before him for endless leagues, the waters teeming with whales, sea- serpents, crocodiles, tortoises and other creatures. The monkey-hosts left behind them Sahya and Malaya and came to the shores of the sea, roaring dreadfully. Then Rama, Lakshmana and Sugriva came down and, passing the forest named Vela, reached the seashore, thickly covered with blocks of stone lashed by angry waves.

Then Rama said to Sugriva, "Friend, we have come to the shores of the ocean. Our old anxiety troubles us still. We can march no further. The waters stretch before us endlessly. We cannot see the other shores. Some ingenious means we must discover, to take us over. Let us encamp our hosts here and take counsel regarding our future plans. Our troops must anyhow reach the farther shores. Well, let them rest for a while here. Now is the time to think of the means of taking them over. Pass stern orders that none should stray from his own division. Let veterans search the country most carefully all round for foes that may lie in ambush."

Forthwith, Sugriva and Lakshmana marshalled the army on the sea-shore where thick woods offered welcome. It looked like an ocean that had come into existence close by another. Then the monkey-leaders entered the Vela woods and stayed there, wondering when they would cross over to the shores of Lanka. The sounds that proceeded from that vast army drowned the roaring of the ocean waves. Sugriva ordered it to be divided into three circles. The heroes came to the water's edge in joy and glee; but their hearts sank within them as they beheld before them an endless waste of waters over which billows mountain-high ever rose and sank, defying all approach. Cruel monsters roamed in its depths. It was ever vexed with storms and gales. The *rakshasas* were seen hovering here and there.

The crocodiles were like cruel planets in the heavens. The tide rose and ebbed most fearfully at the twilights. The sea seemed to laugh with its banks of foam and to dance with its huge billows. The rising moon was reflected from countless waves and the sea was like the home of many moons. Crocodiles with the speed of powerful gales, whales that gobble up the *'timi'* one hundred *yojanas* in length, huge sea- serpents, with hoods bright with many gems, seals, walrushes, sea-elephants, *simsumara* and other creatures of the deep roamed in the sea. Rocks and mountains, reefs and barriers rendered it dangerous for ships to sail. Hence, the *asuras* made it their haunt. Makara fish were found there, huge in bulk and looking like serpents; and in the heavens above, the *nagas* (serpent-gods) moved about. The waters of the ocean were lashed with gales and huge billows rose and sank; in the sky, cloud-banks were formed and scattered again by strong winds. The water drops in the ocean shone like sparks of fire at night; and in the sky the constellations gleamed. The waters of the sea were black and clear; and the sky above was just the same. There were huge serpents in the sea; and in the sky there were *uragas* (serpent-gods). *Asuras* lived in the sea and so they did in the sky above. The sea struck terror into the hearts of beholders, and so did the sky. Hence the sea was like the sky and the sky was like the sea. The ocean-bed was paved with priceless gems, and the sky above with brilliant stars. The huge billows looked like reflections of the clouds above. Verily there was no difference between the sea and the sky. The terrible thunder of the clashing waves was like the sound of the huge war drums of Ocean-king beaten during battle.

CHAPTER 5

RAMA'S DISTRESS ON SITA'S SEPARATION

(We have seen that Rama is adorned with the excellences of gratitude acting in the best interests of his friends, careful investigation of anything he means to do, and boundless energy and enthusiasm — all perfections to be found in the saviour of the world. In this chapter we see that he is also endowed with compassion, the crowning excellence).

Nila, the General, encamped his monkey-hosts on the northern shore of the ocean. He placed sentries and took other precautions as laid down in the science of war. Mainda and Dvivida were ordered to be ever alert, scouting in all directions against possible surprise attacks. The vast army settled satisfactorily by the sea-shore.

Then Rama turned to Lakshmana by his side and said, "They say that the grief of separation from one's beloved wears away in course of time. But to me, who am denied the sight of Sita, each day but makes my sorrow heavier." You may say, "What cause have you to grieve? Is it that your wife has been carried away by a cruel foe and is now in distant land? It is easy for you, the flower of valour and chivalry to rescue her." Well, we shall build a causeway and lead Sugriva and his forces to Lanka and bring back Sita. Yes, I shall cut off the ten heads of the redoubtable Ravana and bring her back. No, I do not grieve that she is gone for ever. But I am sad that the golden time of youth and enjoyment is being wasted. The moon that she beholds, I too behold. Seeing it, I see her too. Vayu, God of Wind! I pray you blow on me from where my lady dwells. Touch her, and then touch me. Through you, I shall clasp her to my breast. (These words proceed from his human aspect — Tilaka).

"Let this be. This is not the real cause of my grief. Could not Sita stay in Ayodhya enjoying every comfort and luxury. She left it all behind and followed me into the forest. When Ravana laid his hand upon her, she could, at that very moment, have reduced him to a heap of ashes through the fire of her purity. But she held back, because she thought it would not become a wife who had a husband to guard her. She would do nothing to dim my fame and hence she called upon me as her lord and protector. She trusted in my power to protect her; she sought refuge in my love and valour. That thought consumes me even as a cruel poison courses through the body and inflames every part. (Rama grieves because he could do nothing to assuage Sita's sorrow. This is compassion).

"Love is the fire that rages through my body. Separation from Sita is the fuel that feeds it. Constant thoughts of her are the flames. This fire grows more and more fierce and consumes me day and night. Lakshmana! If you had not been here by me to remind me of Sita, I would long ere this have entered into the depths of the sea and slept there happy and free from care. But the fire of love that rages in me will burn me up even in the waters where I might be asleep. Despite this unbearable torture, I keep my hold on life, only because she and I live on the selfsame earth. To me whose love for her is beyond measure, this thought is as if we were lying on the same bed. A parched field draws sustenance by being near to another full of water; even so, the news of her being among the living keeps me too alive. Alas! when shall I deal destruction to my foes? When shall I, like a lucky man bringing to his homestead untold wealth, behold again my Sita with eyes like the petals of the red lotus? When shall I raise, ever so lightly, her face with her lovely lips, like the lotus in bloom, and sip the nectar there, even as a sick man drinks eagerly of a potent medicine? When shall I feel the living touch of her firm and close breasts against my body in sweet embrace? My love whose dark deep eyes are light of my soul, is now in the cruel grip of hideous demons. She looks for some one to save her from their clutches, but not to me, her lover and husband. How could Sita, the daughter of Janaka, the daughter-in-law of King Dasaratha, and dearer to me than my life itself, how could she sleep in the midst of the *rakshasa*-women? When will she free herself from her *rakshasa*-guards and walk in brightness, even as the moonbeam emerges from the rain-clouds in autumn? Janaki, ever delicate by nature, has now fallen upon evil days; and grief and hunger have no doubt made her slimmer still. When will my keen shafts pierce the cruel heart of Ravana and bring an end to my misery? When will I recover her? When will she, pure, devoted, fair as a goddess, clasp my neck and shed tears of joy? When shall I shed from me this terrible grief of separation from her, even as a man discards soiled garment?

The sun descended in the west. Then, being consoled by Lakshmana, he offered worship to the Goddess of Twilight.

CHAPTER 6

RAVANA HOLDS COUNCIL

RAVANA observed the dreadful vestiges of Maruti's short stay in Lanka, and he hung down his head in shame. Then he said to the *rakshasas* around him, "This Lanka of ours has so far been unapproached by any foe. And now a wretched monkey has made his way into it; he has had speech with Sita; he ranged at will through the city. He shattered the lofty mansion at the centre of the capital. He has slain our heroes. He has reduced the city to cinders. What should I do now? Think deeply upon what is good for us and let me know. We shall do even as you advise. May all good be with you. Do not tell me 'Why should you seek counsel when your might is limitless?' The wise have it that good counsel is the root of success. Hence, though you are all veterans in war and irresistible, it is proper for us to take counsel against this Rama. Do not tell me that my own counsel is best. For, those who seek counsel are of three kinds. Hear me speak of their excellences and defects. The highest takes counsel from ministers grown grey in wisdom and ever watchful of his interests. He takes the advice of friends who share his joys and sorrows, or of his kinsmen who live but for him, places the burden on God and commences action. The next one seeks counsel but of his own heart; he takes all the responsibility upon himself and tries to achieve his objects all alone. The lowest is he who embarks upon a course of action, without due investigation of the pros and cons, without any care for the grace of God. He begins in haste and falls into indifference after a time.

Even so, counsel is of three sorts. The best is that of the ministers who see with the eye of wisdom, guided by the experience of the great and the noble, and deliberate with a harmonious mind. The next is when the opinions conflicting at first gradually unify themselves at the moment of deciding the course of action. The lowest is when the ministers cling obstinately to their opinions and are dead against an agreed decision.

Now, you are most wise and intelligent. Advise me therefore after due deliberation and offer me an united plan. Trust me to carry it out faithfully. Let the past bury itself. Waste no time upon it. Let us shield ourselves against evils to come. Rama would no longer delay to besiege this Lanka with his countless monkey-hosts. Do not think that it is utterly impossible because these trackless waters surround us. He is mighty enough to build a causeway across the sea. He may even dry it up. Somehow he and Lakshmana will surely cross the ocean. Advise me what we should do when they besiege us, these monkey-foes. What steps shall we take with regard to Lanka and the armies that guard it?"

CHAPTER 7

RAVANA'S MINISTERS

WHEREAT those mighty *rakshasas* gave their reply over joined palms. In their overweening might they were ignorant of the prowess of Raghuvira; they were bound by no principles of political science. "Your Majesty! What cause have you for anxiety when you have your enormous armies perfectly trained in the use of clubs, *sakti,* sword, trident, and other weapons, of offence and defence? Well, let us leave them aside. Your Majesty can, alone and unaided destroy all your foes. Did you not march upon Bhogavati, the capital of the *nagas,* and defeat them in fair fight? Kubera, who lives on Mount Kailasa, is the dear friend of Paramasiva. Once he was the object of your respect and affection; he is one of the regents of the quarters; mighty in himself, he has at his beck and call, myriads of *yakshas*. And him you worsted in battle, slew his *yakshas,* and took away from him the car Pushpaka, all because he happened to displease you. Maya, the most powerful of the *danavas,* stood in such great terror of you that he sought your friendship and gave his daughter Mandodari as a wife to you. Did you not descend into the nether world, Rasatala, and put to rout Vasuki, Takshaka, Sankha, Jati, and other dreaded *nagas?* The Kalakeyas, those *rakshasas* that had secured rare boons from Brahma, and that could revive though reduced to atoms — those mighty warriors fought with you for a year. You vanquished them and learned from them many magic arts. The strong and valiant sons of Varuna were put to flight by you. In the vast ocean of the forces of Yama, the God of Death, the crocodiles are the Rod of dissolution; the weapons known as Salmali are the trees that grow on its shores; the noose of Death are the waves; and the terrible henchmen of Yama are the huge serpents therein. And you stirred up that watery waste and won everlasting fame by causing the Lord of Death to flee before you. At that time, you put to flight without any effort all the dwellers on earth. Countless kings, each powerful as Indra, covered the field like mighty trees. Anaranya and other *kshatriyas* faced you in battle but to be despatched to the halls of Death. The denizens of the worlds above and below came against you massed in battle array, but they were dispersed like chaff before a gale. And can this Rama equal them in valour, excellence, or energy? Mighty monarch! Why need you take any trouble yourself? Rest here in ease. Indrajit alone by himself will dispose of all these monkeys. He is mightier than the mightiest and, having completed the sacrifice to Mahesvara, has secured the rarest boons.

The armies of the Celestials are like an ocean; *sakti, tomara,* and the other weapons are the fish that dart in its waters. The bowels of the countless slain are the moss covering it; the elephants are the tortoises, the horses are the frogs; the Rudras and the Adityas are the alligators; the Maruts and the Vasus are the huge serpents; the cars, the horses and the elephants are its waves. The infantry are as numerous as its sands. And Your Majesty's son plunged into that vast ocean, caught the lord of Celestials and kept him a prisoner in Lanka. Then Brahma Himself begged you to release him; and you did so. Indra thanked you heartily and returned to his heaven. Indrajit who did all this for you, can be sent against this Rama and his monkey-hordes. Could a wretched monkey ever bring harm and evil unto you?"

CHAPTER 8

RAVANA'S MINISTERS — *(Continued)*

THEN arose Prahasta, the commander of the armies, huge and dark like a thunder cloud, and spoke with clasped hands. "The gods, the demons, the *gandharvas,* the elementals, the *patagas,* the serpents, and the other hosts of heaven could not confront you in battle; and these monkeys — are they going to conquer you? We were negligent, we confess, in the utter certainty that none can stand against us. That was why Hanuman has blackened our faces. This is no disgrace to us, for, we were taken by surprise. Else, could the monkey have made his way here with his life when I am still above ground? Say the word, and I will destroy root and branch, the monkey-race and blot them out from the face of the earth. Feel no regret over the abduction of Sita. I can, all unaided, hold this city against the entire monkey-hosts."

Then arose Durmukha in fiery wrath and cried, "I say what the monkey did has covered us with endless shame. Further, our city and our women's apartments have been defiled by his touch. Worst of all, he has left a blot on the fair fame of our lord and king. And are we to endure all this? So I shall kill, without exception, the entire monkeys in the world, whether they hide in the bowels of the earth or in the waters of the deep or in the nether sphere."

Then Vajradamshtra, matchless in strength, whirled aloft a huge bar terrible to behold and covered with blood and flesh, and roared out, "Why waste words over Hanuman, a despicable wretch, when we have before us Rama, Lakshmana and Sugriva? This moment I shall go forth with this club of mine and slay all of them three and the monkey-hordes. He conquers his foes, who uses cunning as well as tireless energy and patience. Here is my plan. Pray, give heed to it. Let countless *rakshasas,* brave frightful to behold, unshaken in battle, and capable of assuming what form at will, go forth, disguised as men to where Rama is, and tell him calmly, "Lord! Bharata, your brother, has sent us. He follows with the four-fold army". Meanwhile, we shall course through the sky armed to the teeth and despatch to the world of Yama the monkey-hosts with our weapons and magic arts. Rama and Lakshmana will be tricked by us and we shall kill them easily when they come near us."

Nikumba, the son of Kumbhakarna, spoke blazing with wrath, "Every one of you, I pray you, remain seated as you are here, before the king. I alone shall slay Rama, Lakshmana, Sugriva, Hanuman and the other monkeys, and return to report."

After him, spoke the *rakshasa* Vajrahanu, mountainous in bulk. He licked his lips in sweet anticipation as he replied, "Every one of you here, mind your own business, giving up all care and concern. Eat, drink, and amuse yourselves. I shall go alone to meet Rama, Lakshmana, Sugriva, Hanuman, Angada, and the other monkey-heroes and kill them all."

CHAPTER 9

VIBHISHANA

THEN Nikumbha, Rabhasa, Suryasatru of great strength, Suptaghna, Yajnaha, Mahaparsva, Mahodara, Agniketu, Durdharsha, Rasmiketu, Indrajit, Prahasta, Virupaksha, Vajradamshtra, Dhumraksha, Atikaya, Durmukha and other heroes sprang forward, armed with bow, arrows, sword, crowbar, javelin, *sakti*, trident, axe and other weapons, and blazing with splendour, roared out : "We shall go forth this instant to bring you news of the death of Rama, Lakshmana, Sugriva and that wretch of a monkey that has brought dishonour on our Lanka."

Then Vibhishana intervened, and bade them be seated again and said, "The masters of political science counsel us to stretch forth our hand to punish only when persuasions, inducements and dissensions fails. Now this is not the time for force."

"Apart from that, I see no just cause for punishing our foe. As advised by the Books on Polity and after due enquiry through Ministers, one makes enemies only of those that are slaves to the pleasures of the senses, the weak, the young and the old.

"Now Rama is the most careful of men; his might is ever steady and unshaken; his anger is always justified and in place. Hence, no foe dare approach him. And such a man you seek to make your mortal foe. Is there one among us who is not amazed by the doings of Hanuman, who lightly crossed the terrible seas and did such havoc in Lanka? The armies and the might of our foes are boundless; it is a mistake to slight them without further thought".

"Again, it is not just or reasonable to make an enemy of one who has done us no harm. How has Rama injured Ravana? Why did my brother carry away his wife from Janasthana? You may say, 'He slew Khara and this is his offence.' But, that evil-doer was the first to march against Rama, intent upon his death. And if he fell in fair battle, how is that an offence on the part of Rama? Self-preservation to the limit of one's capacity is natural is it not? Even granting that Rama was the first to offend, does it follow that Ravana should carry away his wife? More natural and seeming, it would be to fight with him fairly and teach him a lesson."

"To lay impure hands on the wives of others is a heinous sin that will destroy our wealth, fame, and life itself. All these causes are enough to bring upon us a great fear — all through this Sita. We ought to take her back and restore her. What is the use of making trouble now? It is futile folly to make an enemy of Rama, the prince of heroes and one who treads the path of the highest virtue. Therefore, the only thing to do is to send back the lady Sita."

"Let us restore Janaki to Rama ere his keen shafts lay waste this Lanka which flourishes with its boundless wealth and four-fold army."

"Let us send her back to Rama ere the monkey-hordes, dreadful and resistless, surround our Lanka."

"If we fail to restore the beloved wife of Rama, this Lanka and all the *rakshasa*-warriors will assuredly perish. Your Majesty is nearest of kind to me. I lay my head at your feet and pray you to take my counsel. Verily my words are true and in your best interests. The shafts of Rama are keen, hard and unfailing like the autumnal sun. Ere they destroy you utterly, restore Sita to Rama. Anger is the undoing of prosperity and virtue alike; put it away, I pray you. Righteousness increases fame and happiness; hold it steadfastly. Let us live in comfort with our wives and children. Once again I entreat you, restore Sita to Rama."

Ravana dismissed the counsellors with the words, "Let us think of this further in the morning" and retired to his palace.

CHAPTER 10

VIBHISHANA'S COUNSEL

THE following morning, Vibhishana took his way to the council-chamber of Ravana. His advice served the highest interests of his brother. But it was so unpleasant to him that it required great courage to utter the words. The hall of audience was glorious to behold, adorned with lofty towers like mountain peaks. Many well-laid courts it had, filled with wise and loyal counsellors. *Rakshasas*, highly efficient and expert in arts and sciences, were in constant attendance. The mighty breaths of elephants in rut blew through them like a small whirlwind. The blare of conches was echoed by the sweet sounds of musical instruments. Many youthful maidens of matchless beauty gleamed in and out. The roads that led to it were thick with people talking with one another in joyous excitement. It was adorned with graceful arches, canopies and golden figures of wild elephants. It was like the world of the *gandharvas* in the joyful sounds of song, instrument and dance. It was like the world of the Maruts in its boundless luxury and wealth. It was like the world of the *nagas* in its priceless gems. Even as the Sun with his far-spreading rays passes into a huge cloud-bank, even so did Vibhishana of matchless radiance and valour enter the palace of Ravana. He heard the sound of powerful charms uttered by experts in the *Vedas*, invoking victory for Ravana. Vibhishana beheld there *brahmanas*, learned in every branch of Vedic lore and duly worshipped with curds, ghee, flowers and consecrated rice.

Receiving reverence from the *rakshasas* there, Vibhishana, shining by his spiritual lustre, drew near Ravana and bowed low before him. Guided by the king's eye to a golden seat near him, Vibhishana hailed him, "May victory be yours for ever", in accordance with the etiquette of the court and accepted the seat offered to him. All took their leave excepting only the members of the council; and Vibhishana, having waited till then, spoke to his brother words pregnant with reason and justice. Well-versed in the art of speech, trained to act in consonance with time and place, able to discriminate between the high and low, he won at first the ear of Ravana by pleasant words and sweet, and then laid before him the thoughts that lay next to his heart.

"Brother mine! From the day that Janaki came into this city, we have noticed many evil portents. Sacrificial fires should be surrounded by smoke when lit; later on the smoke should blend with the flames and, when they die out, should leave hot cinders behind. Now, even when offerings are made with due incantations, they do not burn bright. Snakes haunt our hearts, our sacrificial halls and our schools of Vedic study; clarified butter and other cooked oblations offered to the gods are infested with ants. Kine yield no milk. Mighty elephants have turned weak. Horses neigh most piteously; they are hungry even after being fed. Asses, camels and mules are afflicted with some strange disease; their hair falls off and tears stream from their eyes. No treatment can cure them. Flocks of cruel crows alight upon terraces and domes and caw most hideously. Eagles are hovering in circles over the city. Jackals draw near it morning and evening and howl most horribly. Wild beasts have come in crowds to the fortress gates and roar like thunder. Pondering over the defeat and destruction that these omens portend and also the havoc wrought on our fair capital by a monkey, I see no remedy for our ills but restoring Sita to Rama. When I speak thus of what needs to be done, perhaps it is my ignorance or ambition that is at fault. But even so, you should not take it as an offence, I pray you. Our *rakshasas, rakshasis* and the people in the women's apartments have seen all the things that I have described. If you find my advice expedient, then please act upon it. If it does not, pray, be not angry with me. Prahasta and the other counsellors who only echo your thoughts and wishes, do not tell you these things. But I am your brother; I am bound to tell you truly what my eyes have seen and my ears have heard. Hence, I pray you, consider well and then do what is meet."

Thus Vibhishana, his brother, spoke to him, in the presence of his ministers, words that were at once friendly and salutary, pregnant with meaning, pleasantly-spoken and well-supported by reason. This advice was helpful to Ravana in the past, the present and the future; if followed, it would remove the ill-fame of abducting Sita and thus remedy the past; it would increase his prosperity and fame and thus profit him in the present; it would lay up for him a store of merit for his distant future.

But Ravana, though he heard him out, was filled with wrath; and hardened in obstinacy, he cried, "I see no danger in any quarter. Never shall Rama have Sita back. He may secure the help of all the gods and Indra to back him; but he dare not face me in battle." He gave Vibhishana leave to go. Because of his victories over the gods, his boundless strength and his resistless might in battle and because he had ten heads unlike the other mortals, Ravana looked down on Rama as a blade of grass and spurned his brother who gave him sound advice.

CHAPTER 11

THE COUNCIL OF RAVANA

BY carrying away Sita, Ravana had earned the abhorrence of all. No one spoke against Vibhishana; hence, he took it that Prahasta and the other ministers did not support his own stand. His love for Sita clouded his mind and made it a prey to endless anxiety. The day had gone by when he should take counsel with his ministers. Yet, in his folly, he believed that that was the proper time for consulting his ministers and councillors.

Then Ravana circumambulated his huge car, stepped into it and proceeded to the hall of audience. His chariot was fitted with golden windows and adorned with gems and coral; well-trained horses of noble breed were harnessed to it; the sound of its wheels was like the roar of cloud-banks. Guards, variously attired and decorated, and bearing swords and shields, marched before, behind and on either side of the King. Others came following in the rear; some in cars, some upon lordly elephants, some upon lightly prancing steeds, armed with clubs, bars, *sakti, tomara,* axe and trident. Conches, wardrums and other instruments filled the quarters with their music. The thundering of the chariot wheels caused the quarters to tremble. He drove along the royal road bright with the varied wealth of the world. Above his head shone the imperial umbrella, white like the moon. Chowries of pure and crystal handles, fastened with gold wire, were waved on either side. Vast crowds packed the streets and with joined palms shouted, 'Hail! Victory!' And Ravana, shining in the splendour of his person, came to his council-chamber.

It was adorned with pillars of gold and silver fashioned auspiciously according to the highest rules of sculpture. It was inlaid in the middle with flawless crystal and was covered with carpets embroidered with gold. It was Maya, the *asura,* that laid it out with most anxious care. Six hundred *pisachas* (demons) guarded it night and day. Right in the centre was the throne made of *Vaidurya* gems, and furnished with the skins of the animal *priyaka* and pillows of curious workmanship. And on it reclined the mighty lord, Ravana.

Then he turned to messengers, matchless in speed and strength, and said, "Bring me here the best and bravest of the *rakshasas* in Lanka. A serious incident has occurred and tell them we have forthwith to take some appropriate measures".

They coursed through Lanka with the speed of lightning and communicated the order of the King to the *rakshasas* as they were sleeping or amusing themselves. They hastened to obey the call and proceeded to the council chamber, some in graceful cars, some on horses and elephants, and others on foot. Lanka shone bright with them even as the sky covered with eagles. They left their conveyances without and, like lions entering the mountain cave, walked into the hall.

They touched the feet of Ravana and offered their homage. He received them kindly and directed them to seats as became their rank and worth. The high priests on seats of gold, the learned *brahmanas* sat on seats of sacred grass, and their sons and others on the floor covered with rare rugs - all sat close to their king.

Members of the king's advisory council and executive officers thronged the court. They were experts in deciding the expediency of measures; they were equipped with all the qualities that their profession required of them; masters of all arts and sciences, they knew everything that took place in the country. Heroes every one of them, they had eyes of wisdom and were gathered there to consider and advance the highest interests of their master. Then Vibhishana came there in an auspicious car, gave out his name and touched the feet of his brother. He was followed by Suka and Prahasta who were shown to their seats by Ravana.

The *rakshasas* were attired gracefully and decked with ornaments fashioned of gold and gems. The vast hall was filled with delicious perfume from incence, sandal paste, and garlands. None there spoke above his breath. None spoke a word out of place. None uttered a lie. There was no bustle. They were terrible in strength and valour, having achieved every wish of their heart. And the lord of Lanka surrounded by his ministers, mighty, noble and heroic, shone like Indra in the midst of his *vasus*.

CHAPTER 12

RAVANA'S MOTIVE

THEN Ravana noted carefully whether all were present there and said to Prahasta, "General! Arrange that our well-trained four-fold army guards our city still more vigilantly." Then Prahasta departed to place suitable guards, within the mansion of Ravana and without it, made the necessary arrangements for the defence of the capital and reported to his master. "Your Majesty! I have taken care that the capital and its outskirts are well protected. Free from care, you may now proceed to carry out what you have in your mind."

Ravana most earnestly sought the welfare and prosperity of his kingdom. But he slighted virtue, wealth and liberation and pursued only pleasure, the third aim of life(the four aims of life are *dharma, artha, kama* and *moksha)*. "Friends!", He said, "when choice has to be made at any given time between the three aims of life - virtue, wealth and pleasure - you, I hold, are most expert in understanding the results of any course of action, happiness or misery, gain or loss, benefit or otherwise. Till now, no measure that you adopted after due deliberation has ever proved fruitless. Even as the lord of the celestials shines in heaven, girt by the nine planets, the mighty constellations and the hosts of stars, even so, surrounded by you, I enjoy peerless fame and prosperity. I have long had it in mind to acquaint the council with my purpose. But I delayed owing to the long sleep of my brother Kumbhakarna. My brother who is in prowess and martial in might, slept through six months and has opened his eyes just now.

It is not unknown to you that I brought here sometime ago the wife of Rama from Janasthana, where our *rakshasas* dwell. In all the three worlds, she has not her match in beauty. Slender of waist, broad of hips, her face like the full-moon in autumn, her feet rosy, smooth and soft, her nails pink like a statue of gold fashioned by the divine artist in the height of his inspiration, she has stolen my heart. The more I see her, the deeper I am caught in the toils of Manmatha. Her prominent nose and her broad and lovely eyes have delivered me bound hopelessly into the hands of love. It is a wonder that anger and joy produce the same results in us; our complexion changes; grief and care consume us. Tortured though I be by this suffering, and try as I might, I have not succeeded in bending Sita to my will; nor could I find it in my heart to let her go. She entreated me to give her a year's respite in the hope that Rama would come here to rescue her; and I gave her my word for it. I am utterly worn out with my passion for her, like a horse driven to death.

How can Rama and Lakshmana or the monkey cross over this unfathomed ocean, teeming with frightful monsters. But seeing that a monkey came over here, damaged the city and caused us much trouble, we cannot decide how things will turn out. Hence I would have your considered opinion on the matter. I am not afraid of men, yet, bestow your deep thought upon it. Victory has ever come to me in my campaigns against the gods and the demons, yet bestow your careful thought upon it. Rama, Lakshmana, Sugriva and his monkeys have come to the sea-shore in their search for Sita. She must not be given back; Rama and Lakshmana must be slain. Think out a suitable course of action and let me have your conclusion. None other than Rama can cross the sea and take the monkeys over to this side. Hence, I am certain that victory is mine."

Thus did Ravana lament, his intellect clouded by passion. Kumbhakarna was roused to anger and cried, "Among those who seek counsel, you belong neither to the higher nor to the middle group but to the lowest. If you had first taken counsel with us before incurring the enmity of Rama and Lakshmana and carrying off lady Sita, then her heart would lean towards you even as the Yamuna is ever wedded to Mount Yamuna. That was the right time for you to have taken counsel with us. You have let that time pass and now you want our advice. Verily this is like building a dam after the last drop of water has drained away. All this consultation ought to have come before the abduction of the lady; then you would have no reason to regret. Those that consider carefully a proposed course of action, reach a decision and then act without violating *dharma,* never suffer the pangs of remorse. Wrong actions and wrong methods are not merely fruitless, they do us harm even like offerings to the gods in impure vessels.

It is the mark of one, ignorant of political science, when one performs last actions first and first actions last. Now, you should have sought our counsel first, and then have abducted Sita. You should have slain Rama and Lakshmana first and then carried away Sita. But you did neither. When a man is strong and mighty, but is erratic in his course of actions, his foes recognise the impossibility of destroying him in open fight but await patiently the time when he would act without deliberation, even as the swans unable otherwise to cross the Krauncha mountain pass through the small tunnel made by Subrahmanya. You have, without the slightest thought, done a deed frought with danger. Poisoned meat kills him who has eaten it. That Rama has not killed you so far, this is merely due to your good luck. You have done a thing utterly impossible for any one else. But I shall slay your foes and turn it to our advantage. Whoever is your foe — whether it is Indra, the Sun-God, the Fire-God, the Lord of Air, the Lord of Wealth or the Lord of

Waters — I shall slay them all in battle. My body is huge like a mountain and my teeth are sharp. Look at this terrible bar. Armed with it, I shall take my stand on the field of battle and roar like a lion. Indra himself will scream in mortal fear.

But you may doubt if I can face Rama the matchless bowman. Well, an arrow or two I may permit to touch me. The next moment I will quaff his heart's blood and quench my thirst. Have no care. Trust me to slay Rama and bring you victory and fame. Once Rama and Lakshmana are dead, I shall eat up the monkeys, one and all. Brother mine! Amuse yourself as you please. Drink and be merry and care free. When I have sent Rama to the world of Yama, Sita will be yours."

CHAPTER 13

MAHAPARSVA'S VIEWS

WHEN Kumbhakarna spoke out what was in his heart, ignorant of the need for tactful speech before a king, Ravana was furious with rage. Mahaparsva, one of the ministers, thought for a while how to assuage the wrath of Ravana, and spoke reverently over joined palms : "He is a fool who is afraid of walking into a wood teaming with wild beasts and serpents, and taking his fill of the honey there. You have taken all this trouble to bring away Sita, and it is no credit to your intelligence if you refrain from enjoying her. You may say, 'How can I do this unrighteous act, when my foes are yet to be reckoned with? But I ask you, who is the foe and who is the master to you whom the worlds acknowledge as their lord and master? So pay no heed to what is called unrighteousness; crush your foes beneath your feet. Use Sita as you will. If she does not yield, use deceit or violence, even as fowls do. Your wishes once gratified, if any trouble arises from your foes, you know well enough how to meet it. Why should we bother you for this? Kumbhakarna and Indrajit will make Indra armed with his *vajra* howl in terror. The expedients of persuasion, temptation and dissension, recommended by cowards and weaklings, are worthless. I say that force is best and can achieve all things. If any foe makes his way here, we stand ready with our arms to slay him or make him your slave. Should we go and seek our foes where they are?"

It delighted the heart of Ravana to hear the spacious words of Mahaparsva. He made him a rich present and said, "Mahaparsva! In the far past there occurred an incident. No one knows it. I shall tell you about it now. One day Punjikasthala, a nymph of heaven, chanced to go to the world of Brahma to pay her respects to him. Seeing her blazing like a flame in the sky, I was over-powered by passion and laid violent hands on her and rendered her nude. Like a lotus plant trodden on by a mad elephant, she went, crushed and faded, to Brahma's world. Brahma came to know of the disgrace that had befallen her and cried, "Ravana! From this moment, if you lay violent hands on a woman, your head will burst into a thousand pieces." It is fear of this curse that holds me back from doing what I would with Sita.

"Rama knows not that I am like the ocean in force and like the wind in swiftness. Hence he expects, with his monkey-hosts, to face me in battle. What fool dare rouse a lion fast asleep in his mountain cave? What fool dare face the Lord of Death in his terrible rage? Rama has not seen my shafts, cruel like serpents with forked tongues; that is why, he has dared to march against me. Even as torches drive back elephants, my arrows, sharp as *vajra,* will issue unceasingly from my bow and consume him quite. Even as the Sun robs the stars of their light, I shall cut to pieces his rubble of an army. Why, neither Indra with his thousand eyes, nor Varuna, the lord of waters, could defeat me in battle. Are weak mortals to fare better than they? I drove out from Lanka, my brother Kubera, that ruled it before me, and this weakling of a mortal, what is he before my wrath?"

CHAPTER 14

THE WISE COUNSEL OF VIBHISHANA

WITH a sad heart Vibhishana listened to Ravana's misplaced confidence in his own might as also to the senseless boast of Kumbhakarna. Then he offered his own salutary advice, supported by weighty reasons. "Sita is like a mighty serpent; her shapely chest is the terrible hood. Thoughts about her are the cruel venom that deals instant death to others. Her smile is like sharp fangs that undo the minds of the slaves of lust. The five fingers of her hand, on which rests her face in grief, are its five heads. That serpent, huge of body, need not sting a man; its mere touch is fatal. What impelled you to go in search of this serpent, bring it home and instal it in your house? I pray you take her back to Rama this very moment. Take her back to Rama ere the monkeys reach Lanka with bodies like mountain peaks and with teeth and claws as their weapons. Take her back to Rama before his arrows, with the speed of wind and resistless as the *vajra* of Indra, fall on the *rakshasa*-heroes and lop off their heads. Prahasta! You will go on vainly boasting until the keen arrows of Rama fall upon you like thunderbolts and drink your life-breaths. Incensate fool! Do you think that Kumbhakarna, Indrajit, Mahaparsva, Mahodara, Nikumbha, Kumbha and Atikaya can stand before Raghava in fight? Brother mine! Though the Adityas and the Maruts guard you, though Indra and the Lord of Death may fondle you, like a child, on their laps, though you may hide yourself in the sky above or in the nether regions below, Rama will take your life when he wants it."

Then Prahasta stood up and cried, "We fear not in the least your *devas, danavas, yakshas, gandharvas, uragas,* and *garudas.* And now, what is your Rama, but a mere man; a *kshatriya* lad. Never from such a weakling can danger come to us."

Vibhishana was ever intent upon the welfare of Ravana, but his heart leaned also towards the true aims of life — virtue, prosperity and happiness. Of mighty intellect, he hastened to reply to the braggart, "You Prahasta! Those whose hearts are ever inclined to vice cannot even dream of the worlds of light. Your plans against Rama will all miscarry, though you and Mahodara and Kumbhakarna and the king himself put your heads together. Can one cross the ocean without even a raft? Rama is an adept in everything; and you, I and all our *rakshasas* banded together cannot do him the slightest harm. He will sacrifice all other aims of life but will never give up *dharma*. He is a *Maharatha* and knows how to protect himself and his charioteer and destroy the army of his foe in battle. He comes of the line of Ikshvakus who are by nature valiant. He pleases and satisfies all his subjects by his just rule. The worlds ring with the praise of his prowess displayed in his victories over Viradha, Kabandha, Vali and other terrible foes. He is an expert in the art and science of war. The very gods know not his ways. And how can you hope to know them? You will continue to brag thus till your body is pierced by his sharp shafts, with bent points decked with eagle's feathers and utterly irresistible. No one can oppose him in battle — neither Ravana nor Atibala, neither Trisiras nor Kumbhakarna, neither Nikumbha nor Indrajit, certainly not your vaunting self. Devantaka, Narantaka, Atikaya huge in bulk, and Akampana strong as a mountain — all these are but chaff before the terrible wrath of Rama."

"Our king is sunk in the pleasures of senses. Cruel by nature, he acts on impulse, without forethought. And you, his friends in name, are in reality his worst foes. Forgetting his weakness you encourage his cruel nature and flatter him to his heart's content. You have come to destroy the *rakshasa*-race. See you not that a huge thousand-headed serpent has your king in its coils? From this deadly serpent, the wrath of Rama, I entreat you to deliver the king, lest it swallows him quite. Do not sit down with folded hands, saying, "It is now too late. There is nothing to be done." To this, your lord and master, you owe all good things in life, your comfort, your wealth and fame. And you should ward off evil from him and save him, even at the sacrifice of your life. If a man is in the malignant grip of demons of terrible strength, his friends rescue him by any and every means, don't they. Even so, if you are true friends of his, band yourselves together and with one mind, and drag him away, by the hair of his head, if necessary, from unrighteousness. Lakshmana waits, like the fathomless abyss, to engulf him. Before your king falls into it and into the flaming jaws of the oceanfire Rama, stretch out your hands, rescue him and drag him back to the shore."

"What I advise is in the best interests of this Lanka, of all the *rakshasas* that live so happily within its walls, of our lord and ruler and his countless friends. He may not like it; but we must act together and restore Sita to Rama, even if we have to keep our king under restraint. But you may say, "We advise our king but to destroy his enemies. Is this not expedient?' But I ask you, what is the duty of a loyal minister? He should, first and foremost, examine most carefully the valour and resources of the foe and those of his master. He should also consider either's period of ascendancy and decline. When the foe is weak and his master strong, then he attacks the enemy. But if the foe be strong and his master be weak, he comes to terms and makes friends with the enemy if the two are evenly balanced. He has come to know of the whereabouts of Sita; his messenger came upon us unawares and achieved his purpose. He brought a disgrace upon us; he has reduced our fair city to a heap of ashes; he has slain our veterans. Now, with myriads of monkeys at his back, he has reached the shore of the ocean. Soon he will cross it. Now his star is on the ascendancy."

"On the other hand, the capital of our king has been burnt down; his sons have been slain in battle; and so, his star is declining. Hence you should advise him to make friends with Rama and restore Sita."

CHAPTER 15

THE COUNSEL OF INDRAJIT

AS Vibhishana, wise as Brihaspati, proffered his counsel, Indrajit, the best and bravest of the *rakshasa*-heroes, heard him with anger and impatience. Now he sprang up and cried, "Uncle! What words are these? Do you expect any one to take them seriously? Are you not ashamed to speak thus like a white-livered coward? I never expected that any one, much less a scion of the noble race of Paulastya, would talk like this. Fie upon him who speaks and fie upon him who heeds such words. Your words — utterly bereft of strength, energy, valour, splendour or anything good and great — are worthy only of you, not of our far-famed Paulastya race. You live up to your name of *kanishtha.* Most despicable of the *rakshasas!* You quake in sheer fright like an abject coward; and you seek to reduce us to the same plight. Those *kshatriya* striplings, what are they before us? The lowest of our *rakshasas* here would swallow them playfully. The thing called fear is unknown to us. Have you forgotten what happened? The lord and master of the three worlds, the lord of boundless wealth, the leader of the hosts of heaven, mighty and valiant is Indra. And this dreaded Indra, did I strike down. I made his Airavata, the elephant that guards the quarters, bite the dust. I plucked out its tusks and with them put to rout the hosts of Gods. And I, who curbed the pride of the gods, I that made the best and the bravest of the *danavas* cry out for mercy, I whose strength and valour know no bounds, I am to tremble, am I, before two little boys, the sons of that Dasaratha who used to tremble in terror before us? I say, these boys are neither the gods nor the *daṇavas* that confronted me. Why then do you try to frighten me?"

Indrajit was radiant in his might; no one dare approach him; what he said, he did. Vibhishana himself, no mean warrior, listened to him patiently and again offered advice, pregnant with meaning and most conducive to the interests of his master. But it failed to make any impression on the mind of Indrajit. "My dear boy! You are yet a youth. Your intellect has not reached maturity. You are not yet capable of carefully investigating a subject and reaching a sound decision. You rave wildly and foolishly and seek your own destruction. I have been saying again and again with many strong reasons that if we oppose Rama, it would be end of Ravana, his sons, his kin and his army. But you are obstinate in folly. A son of Ravana only in name, you are in reality his relentless foe, bent on bringing about his death. You would ruin not yourself alone, but him that brought you into the world. It is but just that such a misguided fellow should be put out of the world. And the same fate should be meted out to him who admitted you in this council chamber an ignorant and foolhardy lad. You cannot discriminate between right and wrong; you are puffed up with pride; you think yourself the most intelligent man; you never sat at the feet of the good and the great; you know not the rules of good society; you are cruel by nature; your mind ever seeks the path of evil; you never think before you act. Your thoughts run after wicked courses. Base and boyish, you bable nonsense. I thought Prahasta, Mahaparsva and their ilk, were the evil genius of your father; but lo! you have surpassed them all; What do you know of the might of Rama's arrows? You may escape the rod of Brahma and the fire of final destruction. You may flee from the rod of Yama. But none can survive the shower of arrows winged with fire when Rama stands in the field of battle and bends his terrible bow.

"Your Majesty! for our many sins of omission and commission there is but one remedy. Let us hasten to place at the feet of Rama our wealth, our gems, our ornaments, our garments, our most precious possessions; let us take back to him, Janaki, who is like Mahalakshmi herself; let us entreat him to forgive us our sins. Then and then alone shall we and ours live in peace and happiness. I can think of no other course than this."

CHAPTER 16

RAVANA'S ANGER WITH VIBHISHANA

AS Vibhishana spoke, his words fell sweetly on the ears of his hearers, though they cared not to read the meaning behind them. Even if their import was not acceptable, yet they were pleasant to hear. Perhaps if they were uttered in a faint and unimpressive manner, they might not find support. But Vibhishana spoke so forcibly that they sank deep into the heart of Ravana. They not only fell sweetly on the ear but offered remedy for the great danger that hung over his head and they subserved his highest interests. Even if they had not been pleasant yet they should have found acceptance for the one reason that they were most salutary.

The wise have said that the highest truth should not be taught to one who does not seek it and who has not waited upon his teacher for a year at least. The words of Vibhishana could only be addressed to him who had rendered faithful humble service to his teacher and has sought refuge in his holy feet. But in view of the terrible fate that hung over the head of Ravana, Vibhishana imparted to him the highest truth without reserve, Had any one else spoken it, Ravana might have disregarded it. But the speaker was his own brother, a partaker of his joys and sorrows; one who followed him like a shadow and knew everything about him. Such friendly advice, Ravana ought never have slighted. He ought, on the contrary, to have cried out, as Arjuna did to Sri Krishna. "The doubt and delusion that clouded my intellect has cleared away and the sun of wisdom now shines bright." Or he ought at least to have thanked and praised his benefactor; even if he could never reward him, for the noble service rendered by him, the noblest that one man could render to another.

Far from all this, Ravana spoke to his brother Vibhishana, as if to his mortal foe, fierce, cruel words that burnt deep into the heart of his hearer. And why? He was famous as one who knew no other delight than torturing others, and striking terror into all the worlds. Evil deeds came from him with no cause or motive and left behind them remorse and misery. His brother said to him,"Seek refuge in Rama." But his ego cried,"Do nothing of the sort." Ravana was for a time confused; and at last followed his own impulse and the dictate of fate. "One can feel safe with an avowed enemy; one can live without fear with a deadly serpent; but one cannot live with a so-called friend who favours one's foe. (The meaning is,"Leave us and cease calling yourself a *rakshasa*"). Do you know the mutual feelings between nearest of kin, among all peoples? I know the envy and hatred in their hearts. One rejoices when another, a "dear" brother or cousin, suffers a blow. And you, seeing the trouble I am in, you cannot contain yourself, but jump with you. Brothers cannot bear to see one of themselves excel in prowess or efficiency in learning or virtue. They eagerly wait for a chance to pull down the noblest among them. What wonder is there if you envy me, crowned with manifold excellences? One's kinsmen do not reveal their real feelings. To all appearance, they behave like the best of friends; but at heart they are cruel and treacherous and ready to betray at the first stroke of adversity. You too have been waiting long for the hour of peril when you can do me harm and drag me down. Yes, my brother one has to fear and avoid such kinsmen."

"Once upon a time there lived a herd of elephants in a forest. Some men came there to catch them one morning with tame elephants and ropes. Seeing them, the wild elephants said to themselves, "Alas! We need not dread fire or lethal weapons; we need not even dread the rope in the hands of these men, though it may bind us and hold us down and enable our captors to subject us to tortures worse than death. Our worst foes whom we should dread most are these our kinsfolk who are cruelly prepared to advance themselves by betraying us. These kinsfolk teach men all kinds of tricks for capturing us; doubt it not. We all know very well that our kinsfolk are the cause of the greatest danger to us."

"You may say, There is no cause for you to fear, since our kinsmen are friendly to us." But I say, just as it is natural for cows to give us plenty of milk and curds to serve as offerings to the gods, just as it is natural for brahmins to be self-restrained, just as it is natural for women to be fickle, it is equally natural for kinsmen to bring danger upon us. Because I come of the noblest lineage, because the worlds ring with my praise and because I have placed my foot on the necks of my foes your heart is consumed with envy of me!"

"You may say,'I have been with you from the time of my birth; and would I prove false to you?" I answer, 'Does the water drop cling to the lotus leaf? Even so, a traitor may stay long, with us and yet have no attachment to us.'

"You may say, 'I owe everything to you and would I seek to do you evil?' My answer is, the bee that had drunk its fill of honey, would it care to sit on the flower that fed it? Even so, traitors forget benefits received. And you are no better.'

"If you say, I have been your best friend till now, would I seek to ruin you and myself too?' I answer, 'After a great deal of trouble, the elephant is washed clean. But then, the very next moment it scatters dust all over itself. Even so, traitors go in search of harm. The autumn clouds roar aloud, but cannot shed a drop of rain. Even so, you deceive a man by loud professions of friendship, but you are barren of good. Let me tell you that if any one but yourself had dared to speak such words to me, would he be alive at this moment? Deadly canker of the *rakshasa*-race! Wretch! I let you live for the only reason that you are my brother. Fie upon you! Run away from here."

Pierced to the heart by these cruel words and convinced that his wise and well-meant advice had no effect on Ravana, Vibhishana snatched up his mighty club and with four *rakshasas* who were his friends, sprang into the sky. He was beside himself with indignation. And yet, he felt a tinge of compassion as he thought, "Alas! he goes to his destruction and there is no one to stop him. Let me try once again. Perhaps he will listen this time." He had renounced Lanka, his numerous friends and immense wealth. He had removed every obstacle from his path. Setting out on the quest of Rama's grace, he shone in the lustre of service to the Highest.

"Your Majesty! No matter how harshly you speak to me, yet you are my brother. It is not for me to contradict you. You may speak what you please. You may say, "Why do you go away, if you cannot render fit reply? "Why don't you put with your lot?" Now, you are my elder. You are, as it were, my father, an object of reverence. But your feet have strayed from the path of right. Your words are false. I cannot endure your cruel words. My advice was just and true and in your highest interest. But those deluded by ignorance and caught in the current of Time and Fate, they cannot listen to good counsel. It is easy to find, anywhere in the world those who speak sweet words and also those that lend their ears to them. But rare, rare indeed is one who has the courage to speak what is salutary, but bitter to hear; and rare too is the friend who listens to such advice.

"You may say, 'Why waste your breath upon him who would not hear you?' The noose of Time, that destroys all creation, is round your neck. And how can I be indifferent to your plight? When one's house is on fire, how sad is one's heart as one leaves it? I cannot stay to see my brother done to death by Rama's arrows, decked with gold and blazing like flames. The ocean billows wear away slowly but surely the sand-banks in their path; even so, the noose of Time slowly strangles and destroys the mightiest heroes and veterans. So, delude not yourself with the fond hope, "Danger can never come near me!" Pray, pardon my blunt words, spoken solely in your interest. You are my elder and it is up to me to find a way any how, at any cost, to save you and this Lanka and these *rakshasas*. May all good be with you. I go away from you. May I hope that you will be glad and at peace, now that you will no more be troubled by my presence. I did my very best to turn you away from unrighteousness and to serve you for your good. But you would not listen to me. Those to whom death draws near do not accept the good advice of their best friends.

CHAPTER 17

VIBHISHANA SEEKS REFUGE WITH RAMA

VIBHISHANA having thus spoken to Ravana harsh words, came in the space of a *muhurta* to where Rama was with Lakshmana. The monkeys saw him standing there in the sky, huge of bulk, like the lofty path of 'Meru', resplendent as a flash of lightning. Sugriva and his followers watched him even as he rose in the sky from the court of Ravana. The king of the monkeys thought that Vibhishana came there to do them harm, for the *rakshasa* and his followers, Anala, Sarabha, Sampati and Praghasa were armed to the teeth. His love and devotion to Rama blinded him to every- thing else. Even if one had taken refuge in Sri Rama, Sugriva was ready to drive him out the moment he suspected the new comer of treachery. He had the right to do anything without seeking counsel from others. But, the issue was momentous, kingly polity demanded that he should consult the monkey- leaders; and he was doubtful whether the visitor was a foe or a secret emissary. Though his form and feature showed that he was no enemy, yet, Sugriva's boundless affection for Rama made him suspect every one. However he turned to the monkeys and said, "Friends, do you see that person coming towards us through the highway of the sky with four *rakshasas* armed to the teeth. He is neither an ambassador, nor a secret emissary. It is plain that he is a foe who means no good to us. As a *rakshasa* he is cruel and he comes fully armed with weapons. It will please him to kill every one of us. But this is impossible. Hence he has come to slay Rama, and knowing that Rama, the life of our lives,is gone, none of us would survive.

Hearing this, the monkey-warriors tore up rocks and trees and cried excitedly. "Lord, give your word and in a moment we shall slay these villains. As a morsel for a huge elephant these five are nothing to us. The intelligent Vibhishana marked the monkeys talking excitedly and said to himself, "What does it matter to me, what these monkeys say to one another? Will not Rama, the embodiment of compassion, cast on me an eye of pity? Will not he who knows everything know the love within my heart? The saviour of all the worlds, will He not be my saviour too? He will surely accept me and make me his own.'' With this confidence in the grace of Rama, he reached the northern shore of the sea, went unafraid to the spot where the monkeys were waiting to kill him and stood motionless in the sky so that all could see him. He had absolute faith in the Grace of Sri Rama, who would remove all obstacles in the way and accept him even without an intercessor; yet, he did not straightaway go and take refuge in the Grace of Rama at once. Staying far away, he decided to use Sugriva and his followers, the very persons who obstructed him, as intercessors for him. He prayed aloud that the monkey- lords should plead for him with Sri Rama. He said : ''There is one whose very name is terrible, Ravana, which means one who makes all the countless cry in pain and horror. His conduct is cruel even like his name. He is born of the *rakshasa*- race and countless *rakshasas,* as cruel as himself, serve and worship him. I am his younger brother. They call me Vibhishana. He carried off from Janasthana the dear wife of Raghunatha, the great Ikshvaku king. He slew the eagle Jatayu which tried to rescue the lady. He took the helpless Sita to Lanka and has placed the terrible *rakshasis* guard over her. Such is the heinous offence against Rama. Again and again I said to him humbly and with many sound reasons ''Brother, take Sita back. Restore her to Rama.'' But alas! his end being near, he paid no heed to my good advice. To a dying man, the best medicine tastes like poison. For no reason whatever the Lord has showered his grace on me and made my brother pierce my heart with sharp words and insult me as though I were the meanest of his slaves. In consequence my mind has turned away from all the things the world desires; I have renounced my wife and child, wealth and power. I have come here to seek refuge in Him and find my blessing in his service. The service of Rama is the goal of all aspirations. In Him all beings in all the worlds seek and find refuge. He is born into the race of Raghu; he is a great soul; quickly let him know that I, Vibhishana, stand here.

Thereat Sugriva clean forgot the supreme wisdom and might and valour of Rama, blinded by his boundless love and devotion to him. ''Raghunatha knows no limit to his affection for one who takes refuge in him. The word 'refuge' has but to fall on his earsfor him to open his heart to the person who utters it. But this Vibhishana is deceitful, cruel; and one knows not what evil he would work unto Rama, watching for the right moment with utter patience." Thus he suspected Vibhishana, the soul of innocence and uprightness; he ran to Rama in great haste and trepidation; he won to his side Lakshmana who was naturally of the same opinion and cried, "There is a fellow here by name Vibhishana; he says that he is the brother of Ravana; he comes here with four *rakshasas* to take refuge in you. It is upon you to inquire deeply into what should be done and what should be avoided; you should array the troops as time and circumstances demand it; you should utilise to your purpose all that you have inquired into and come upon a decision. You should also keep a watch over our men and keep yourself informed of their doings by setting secret emissaries upon them; and nothing should escape your notice of what takes place in the army of the enemy. Thus you come to achieve your highest good. Now, these *rakshasas* range the worlds unseen; they are masters of tricks, deceits, and wiles; they take forms at will and are veterans in war. No faith or trust is to be put in them at any time and under any circumstances. This fellow is a messenger sent in secret by Ravana; he comes here to mix with our troops and sow dissentions among us. You may say, "Is it not adding to your strength and taking away so much from that of the enemy if we secure the service of one of our foe men? I say that those that come from our enemies should under no circumstances be given shelter to by us. Moreover, he comes of a race of *rakshasas,* that is but another name for malignity unsurpassed; he is born next to Ravana who is your mortal foe; and has come to us straight from the camp of the enemy. Would you place trust in him? You might say, 'Is it just and righteous that I put away from me one that has taken refuge in my mercy and might?' But this is no genuine case where one is forced to take shelter under another by danger or misfortune. He but seeks to win your confidence by this deceitful means and work evil at the right time. So, it seems to me best that we should slay this wretch sent to us by Ravana. I know full well that your kindness and mercy is absolutely boundless, but is it not right that you should exercise it on those who deserve it? You may say, 'Let us wait for the time when this *rakshasa* would actually work us evil; there is time enough to punish him.' But this is no ordinary *rakshasa*. He is extremely intelligent, clever and resourceful. Should we give him a place among us, not knowing that he has come to ruin us, he will without the least shadow of a doubt, wait for the time when we are under difficulties to work our ruin. You may say, 'How is it possible for one lonely man to destroy our countless myriads.' Yet it is not so very difficult and impossible to one who is acquainted himself with our strength and weakness. An owl came to know that the crows could not see him in the dark; it entered into their nests and slowly and systematically slew them all; you might have heard of this story. I tell you that this fellow is the born brother of Ravana, the most cruel of all beings. You made a mistake in not despatching Maricha to the halls of death when he crossed your path at first. If now, you allow this Vibhishana to survive, he too will do you as much harm as Maricha did. Therefore his followers should first be beheaded and their heads presented to him. Then he himself should be burnt alive. It will never do to slay him with a single shaft, as you did Vali. We should subject him to slow and cruel torture." Having said this, Sugriva waited for Rama's reply. He thought, "My Lord is the wisest of man; he reads the hearts of men through their words. I have spoken too much already. Let me listen to his reply and then say more if there be need."

Sri Rama, ever overflowing with grace towards those who turn to him, looked about for some ground for setting aside the arguments advanced by Sugriva with such earnestness and spirit. He knew that Vibhishana was deeply devoted to him and would not mind waiting for a while. Since Vibhishana's one wish was to be admitted into the *vanara*-company, Sri Rama thought it inapt that the new-comer should be brought to him by Sugriva, the *vanara*-chief who argued against his admission. Hence Sri Rama turned to Hanuman and the other monkeys and said, "Friends! you have all heard what Sugriva, your king said about this visitor of ours. His words are pregnant with meaning and supported by strong reasons. But because Sugriva has spoken out his mind, you, my other friends, should not suppress your own views. On such occasions, every good friend of mine, who is intelligent and devoted to my interests should make known his true opinion."

Then the monkey-lords ever seeking the highest good of Sri Rama hastened to express their opinions. They said, "Lord is there anything in all the countless worlds that is hidden from yourthere anything in all the countless worlds that is hidden from your eye? You still desire to hear what we have to say only because you would show to the world that Sri Rama is our friend; and this fame you desire to secure unto us. You have passed your word that never fails to throw your shield over any one that seeks refuge in you be he your bitterest enemy. You are the soul of valour; your feet never stray from the path of right; there is nothing about or below that can in the least disturb your firmness and fortitude. All-knowing, though you be, you never fail to deeply investigate a thing and find suitable reasons for your decision and action. There is no help or assistance rendered to you that you do not imprint it on your heart and return a millionfold. You are ever at the service of those that have the privilege to call themselves your friends. So let our counsellors, wise and clever place before us with suitable reasons their well-considered views on this question."

Then Angada was the prince-regent and stood next to Sugriva in rank and dignity; so he spoke out his deeply considered opinion on testing Vibhishana. "It matters not whether one takes refuge in you when he comes from the enemy's camp. We must ponder deeply on whether he is for us or against. So we should repose our trust in him only after we have carefully tried and tested him, as soon as we can. It is not very difficult for men of deep cunning to behave so that the world may take them as honest men; they know full well to disguise their persons' dress, speech, and any other thing that may give them a way. They but wait for our careless moments to work evil to us. And that would lead to untold danger. Therefore, we would not do well to place our confidence in them at once. Give him something to do that we may acquaint ourselves with his virtues and vices. If we are satisfied that his merits outweigh his defects, let us take him among us; but if, on the other hand his demerits crowd out his few virtues, we shall have nothing to do with him. But the worlds hold none who has neither a single virtue nor a single defect. This Vibhishana may be a combination of numerous good points with a few defects scattered among them;

then he deserves our favour and friendship but if it is all the other way, he deserves to be cast out."

Then Sarabha said to himself, "How can you come to know a person's merits and demerits unless you entrust him with something to do. But if you do this outright, it may arouse suspicion and we will lose his well-meant help and acquaintance. So Angada's advice is no better than that of his uncle." So he said to Rama, "Lord, the advice of Angada is not practicable. I would rather suggest that we send one of us to observe Vibhishana carefully according to the rules laid down in the books on kingly polity. There is time enough to take counsel deeply over the pros and cons of it and admit the *rakshasa* to our confidence."

Jambavan keen and mighty of intellect, thought within himself, "It is not possible for us to lay bare the heart and soul of this *rakshasa* by setting him on some task or by careful observation by a messenger from us. Again there are more reasons than one why we should not place any trust in him." He then gave expression to his opinion that was not fraught with risk and danger as those of the others, and on the other hand had very many good points to recommend it. He said "Ravana is the lord of myriads of *rakshasas* wicked and cruel by nature. A sinner of the blackest dye, his hatred towards us is indescribable. This Vibhishana has not come to us at the right place. We are yet far far from Lanka. So there is no reason why he should be afraid of us. What has he to gain by coming to us now? Further, this is not the right time when he should come to us. His Lord and brother Ravana is in great danger; and is it a time when a brother would turn against him and go to the enemy? View the thing from any point you like. It is but just and proper that we should suspect him."

Then Mainda said to himself, "True from every point of view he is open to suspicion. But if we do not test and prove him by some quick and easy means and if he is indeed an honest friend, we might well lose a strong ally who comes to us of his own accord."

Then he spoke aloud skilfully and good logic, "Lord, talk to him in accents strange and sweet. Question him about Ravana and his concerns. Thus, we shall find out the truth in his heart. If he proves good, let us accept him. If not, let us cast him out.''

''Next spoke Hanuman of steady wisdom, born of profound knowledge of the *sastras,*the first among the counsellers of Sugriva. In words sweet and clear, pithy and pregnant, he gave out his opinion:-''Lord, you are master of every branch of kingly polity; you are endowed with a mighty of intellects; your skills in speech and action is peerless. Now, even Brihaspati, the god of wisdom, cannot offer you better advice than what suggests itself to you. In every way you are the best and highest. I cannot tell you anything that is not known to you. It is not because I take pleasure in speaking, nor because I am envious of my brother counsellors, it is not because I am proud of my superior intellect or persuasive eloquence, that I venture to offer you my opinion. I speak, only because you honoured me by calling for my advice. I obey your call''.

''Now, some here have suggested the method and the means of discovering and balancing his merits and defects. I hold that this procedure is not practicable. How can we test whether Vibhishana is honest, unless we set him on some task connected with affairs of the state. And it is risky to entrust such a task to him without making sure that he is honest. Thus, we are caught in a vicious circle. (Here he answers Angada without naming him). Some others suggested that we could have him observed by our messengers. We employ emissaries only to know things hidden or distant from us. But this Vibhishana is near at hand, we can see him directly with our own eyes; there he stands in sky. What is the secret to be gained by setting a spy to watch him? (He here refutes Sarabha).

Others argue that he has not come to us at the right time and place. By deep thought he has known that Ravana is the lowest of the low and you are the highest of the high. He has tested and proved your merits and defects. He has realised that Ravana, by his refusal to restore Sita to you, is seeking the destruction of the *rakshasa*-race. He is convinced of your might and prowess from the fate of

Khara, Dushana, and their armies and from the slaying of Vali and the crowning of Sugriva; he has seen your preparation for crossing the waste of waters that no one has thought of crossing before. He has concluded that Ravana, stained with sin is no friend and that you, with your virtue, is a friend indeed. Thus, considered from every point of view, his coming to you, it seems to me, is fully justified by time, place and circumstances. (Here he refutes Jambavan).

Some of us advised you to read the heart of Vibhishana by having him watched by our spies. Well, if an intelligent man is suddenly questioned by a stranger about his concerns, he would think, "Now these people speak to me thus, because they do not trust me. I should be careful how I speak .' And he would hesitate long and consider much before giving a reply. A friend, who comes to us with good intentions, would turn wicked and hostile, if he knows that we are testing him and are watching him in secret. These devious methods serve no purpose. Even those who think very highly of their own cleverness interpret aright the words of others.

Thus I have pointed out, the defects I could see in the suggestions offered so far. Now I venture to place my own opinion before you. I noted most carefully what Vibhishana said to us, and I could find nothing wrong or wicked in it. His face is clear and serene; hence, I have no suspicion of him. One who would betray us in secret can never come to us free from all care and doubt. Again, in his words no fault could be discovered. Thus, I have not the least suspicion about him. (These were the very words addressed by Sri Rama to his brother Lakshmana about Hanuman when they first met him). Some may say, 'A man of deep cunning can hide his thoughts from others. How then can we put our trust in him?" Thoughts may be kept hidden, but the features cannot be hidden for long. Somehow and at sometime what is within will break all bounds and betray itself. Further he makes every effort to secure his purpose quickly by approaching the right people at the right time and place. I see no defect in him; on the contrary, I see in him the merit of knowing and doing what is right. He sees clearly Ravana's wickedness and your virtue. He knows full well that his plans will miscarry and yours will succeed. He remembers how you slew Vali and placed Sugriva on his throne. He would fain have the kingdom of Lanka. There is thus sound sense and reason in his coming here. He is a *rakshasa* no doubt; but I have given the grounds for my belief that he is honest and sincere and may be accepted. But what is right and what ought to be done, this is not unknown to you. And it is your orders that we await."

CHAPTER 18

RAMA'S PLEDGE

FROM Vasishtha and the other elders Sri Rama had heard stories of heroic virtues like those of the dove, Kandu Maharshi, and other righteous souls. Hence his mind was not confused by the objections raised by the *vanaras*. The words of Hanuman confirmed and clarified his view which he made plain. "I too have something to say about Vibhishana," he said, "and you, who are interested in my welfare, should listen to it and give me your conclusion. I never foresake one who comes to me as a friend. Even though he has many faults, I shall accept him and the good will not condemn my action."

Sugriva fully understood Rama's intention. He was filled with fear about the risk his Lord was taking. Because of his love for Raghuvira, he said, "Lord, this *rakshasa* may be good and true, or he may not; but in any case he is ungrateful. He has turned his back upon his brother at the moment of danger and difficulty. Is there any one whom he will not betray? Lanka, a heap of ashes, his sons dead, his mortal foe crossing the sea and ready to besiege the city — can Ravana face greater adversity?"

Rama smiled and said to himself, "Sugriva speaks thus because he knows not the secret of *Dharma,* my infinite power and my pledge of protection to those that seek refuge in me." Hence he replied to him according to the rules of kingly polity. He cast his eyes once on the monkey-lords around him and addressed himself to Lakshmana, the soul of virtue: "No one can speak thus who has not earnestly studied the scriptures and sat at the feet of great teachers. But in this matter something very subtle has to be observed. It is seen in all rulers and in the fruit of wide experience. One's next of kin and the king of an adjacent country are presumed to be one's enemies. They wait for the hour of danger to do harm. But some good kings trust their next of kin, regard them as friends and well-wishers and treat them with honour. Even such noble kings may look with suspicion upon this Vibhishana with all his excellence. In this world full of sinners, the best of men fall under suspicion and distrust. It is no wonder then that the wicked Ravana should suspect the righteous Vibhishana. Therefore, he has come here, cutting himself off from his brother. I have explained to you why I think he has turned his back upon Ravana."

"Now I shall explain why I should not turn him away from me. Some of you have said that it is not safe to take one that has come from the enemy's camp into our own. Now let us go into this matter according to the rule of kingly polity. I am not the brother of Ravana or his next of kin. I have not the slightest desire for his kingdom or possessions. It is Ravana that regards this *rakshasa* as his enemy. I entertain no such feelings towards him. Hence this *rakshasa* will never desert me. He but desires to secure the kingdom after the death of Ravana through my hands. He would refrain from doing me harm, if only for fear that his own purpose might fail. You may ask, "Do you credit him with such foresight?" I answer that there well might be persons of discrimination even among *rakshasas*. Hence, he may be admitted among us. Brothers and cousins often do not live in amity and mutual loyalty, and dissensions are natural among them. This Vibhishana feared dire danger from his wicked and mighty brother, Ravana, and he has come here for safety; his voice and words reveal this. Therefore I see no harm in taking him among us."

"Seldom we find one following the rule that one should obey one's elders though they be sinful and wicked. Is every younger brother like Bharata, or every son like me? Or every friend like you? The kingdom comes to Bharata legitimately, thanks to the boons secured by Kaikeyi from Dasaratha. And yet he rejects it, seeks me out in the forest, bows at my feet with the utmost reverence and says, 'Brother, the kingdom is yours. Come home, wear the crown and rule over us. I shall serve and obey you in all ways.' Who but Bharata could act thus? (No reference is made to Lakshmana here because there was no chance for him to show what he was capable of doing). No son in the world is as blessed and fortunate as myself. My father gave up life unable to bear the grief of parting from me. Which son has had such a fond and loving father? Even rarer is it for one to have a brother like Bharata and friends like you. During the rainy season, I gave vent to my anger at Sugriva's remissness. Noticing this, Lakshmana pierced the heart of the monkey-king with cruel words. But Sugriva took no offence at all. On the contrary, with boundless love and loyalty, he helps me in every way and you stand by him all the time. Now, who could have such faithful friends?"

Sugriva was thus unable to convince Sri Rama through the rules of kingly polity that Vibhishana should be rejected. His heart was troubled that, if Vibhishana were admitted before ascertaining his secret intents and purposes, he might work evil to Rama any time. Blinded by extreme love for Raghunatha, he thought that the self-surrender of himself and Lakshmana was the best attitude that any one could adopt towards Sri Rama. He wanted Rama to put away Vibhishana even before the latter took refuge in him. He said, "Oh Lord! Never for a moment should you extend your patience and forbearance towards this Vibhishana. He has come here only at the bidding of Ravana. There is no doubt about it. You should not give him a place in our midst. You should reject him straightaway. Cunning and deceitful, Ravana has sent him here to find out our secrets and the right time when he can do us most harm. The moment you place trust in him, he is sure to do some harm to you or to me and who knows what harm he will do to Lakshmana? Hence, we cannot do better than slay out of hand this *rakshasa* and the four counsellors accompanying him. There can be no sin in getting rid of the brother of Ravana, that monster of cruelty. Where is the need for making further enquiries?" But finding Rama yet unconvinced, and because of his great love for him, Sugriva gave way to wrath. (Sugriva did not really fear any harm to himself or Lakshmana. But he spoke thus because he knew that an offence to a devotee was far more heinous than one to the Lord himself and that Sri Rama would never pardon any offence given or harm done to a devotee of his).

"Rama listened and thought, "Alas, it is Sugriva's boundless love for me that makes him speak these words. He does not know that none in all the worlds can do me harm; that I am omnipotent; that I am *pledged* to save every one that seeks refuge in me. He has to be told that this course of action is laid down in the Sacred Books and must be followed by me." So he replied, "Well, let this *rakshasa* be most wicked or let him be virtuous. Either way, what can he do to me? Do you think that he can do any harm to me or to any one that has taken refuge in me, or to any one that has taken refuge in such a devotee? Mighty Ruler of the monkey-world! Do you imagine that it is you and your monkey-armies that stand between me and danger? Know that without giving you the least trouble, I can destroy all the *rakshasas* on earth as also the *danavas, yakshas, pisachas* and all other creatures, merely with the tip of my little finger if I so choose. I need no weapons. Nay, the other fingers need not help. Even of the little finger, the tip is enough. Why speak of these puny *rakshasas* of Lanka? The thought of slaying them has not yet entered my mind. When it does, these *rakshasas* will no more be seen. Therefore, you need nor dream that any harm can come to me from this Vibhishana. Granting that he can harm me and that I may lose my life, even then, I will not turn him away from me; I must save him. In this connection, let me tell you a well-known story.

"Once upon a time there dwelt a pair of doves in a forest. One day a fowler came to the spot and caught in his snare the female bird. Night came on and darkness enveloped the world. A great wind blew and it rained hard. Sorely buffeted, the fowler wandered here and there for shelter and hungry and tired, he came by chance to the foot of the very tree where the male bird was. The dove noticed the misery of the fowler and thought of helping him. Yet it held back because he was the natural foe of its species. Then, the female bird, held captive in the hunter's net, said to her mate, 'My dear, waste no thought on me. I have been caught in this fowler's net. There is only one thing that should occupy your mind. This man has come to our dwelling. He is our guest. Rain, cold, darkness and hunger afflict him. If we now fail to give him the welcome due to a guest, the pure and righteous life we have been leading till now would be wasted."

"Now the bird on the tree did not belong to the *Brahmana,* or the *Kshatriya* or the *Vaisya* caste. It was not bound like a man to observe the duties of the various orders of society; nor was it a man who could at least put in practice the ordinary rules of a good life. It was but a bird. The fowler was the born enemy of its species, had caught its mate in his net and in a few moments he would make a meal of her. Indeed if he helped the hunter now he too would be killed and eaten."

"Further, the hunter had not sought his help nor taken refuge in him. Nor had he come there by choice, seeking the dove's dwelling place. By accident he had come to the foot of the tree; and placing his joined palms over his head, said 'Oh! Guardian Deity of this tree! I seek refuge in you."

"Even so, the dove looked on the fowler as a god and entertained him with reverence. It flew hither and thither, gathered a heap of *twigs* and dried leaves, lit a fire and provided warmth for the fowler. It brought him what fruits and roots it could get at that time. But he saw that the hunter's hunger was not satisfied. As it was the custom to propitiate the gods by offering sacrifices in the fire and as he could not find any other meat and considering that it would be improper to harm any other creature while his own body was available, he threw his body into the fire that he had kindled and prayed to the fowler to satisfy his hunger. Thus the dove found a place for himself in the bright worlds on high. Now this bird was all alone while we have countless *vanara*-warriors to help us. The fowler was the born enemy of the dove, while Vibhishana is no foe.

"The fowler caught the female dove, while it was not Vibhishana who took away my wife. Nay, if Ravana himself came and sought refuge in me, I ought to protect him even at the cost of my life as the dove protected his enemy. The fowler did not seek refuge with the dove. Here Vibhishana has sought refuge in me. Though he has come from the enemy's camp, he is not my enemy.'

"One of my ancestors, Raghu by name, extended his protection to a *rakshasa* as the story goes. Perhaps this Vibhishana has heard of it and come to me seeking protection."

"The dove extended all the rites of hospitality to the fowler and brought comfort and satisfaction to him by giving up his own life. We, on the contrary, are seeking cruel ways of punishing Vibhishana. Nay, we would slay not only him but even those who have come with him!"

"The dove knew that the fowler was his relentless foe and had done him grievous harm; still he welcomed the hunter with kind words. Free from anger or hatred, he entertained his guest with open hand and warm heart, as the books say, 'A guest must be attended to until his hunger is appeased.' We, on the contrary, have conclusively taken for our enemy whose conduct are those of a good friend. Moreover, we are planning to speak falsely to him, to deceive him and visit him with dire punishment."

"The ignorant love the body as themselves; the wise, on the other hand, look upon the body as an instrument for the practice of virtue. This dove disregarded the body altogether and, like the Maharshi Sarabhanga, offered it up cheerfully, considering this a great spiritual act."

"It was not born, like me, in a class where one is entitled to practise *dharma*. It was not born, like me, in the line of Ikshvakus who are pledged to offer protection to all that seek it."

"By birth and nature, the fowler was base; that night he was homeless and helpless; his heart knew no pity; no kind word ever passed his lips. And yet the dove entertained him, even this wretch, and that at the cost of his own life."

"In the far past a bird came down from the heavens to test the heart of the Emperor Sibi. Now this dove was no such god in disguise; it is an ordinary bird. Like the elephant king, rescued by the Lord, it walked the path of highest righteousness, owing to the merit it had laid up in former births. Now let this be."

"One day a hunter, chased by a tiger, came to the foot of a lofty tree; there was a monkey among its branches, and the hunter sought refuge with the animal and was given a place on the tree. The tiger came there and, finding the monkey fast asleep, said to the hunter, 'The monkey sleeping there is nothing to you. Throw him down to me. I shall make a meal of him and go away without doing you any harm.' The hunter, treacherous by nature, trusted the words of the tiger. To save his own dear life, he pushed down the monkey. The tiger caught hold of the monkey and said, 'Go up again and kill the hunter who betrayed you.' But the monkey knew somewhat of right or wrong. He acted as if he was willing to save himself by throwing the hunter down to the tiger. When he was safe once more among the branches, he forgave the hunter for his treachery, calmed his fear that he would take revenge, kept watch over him till the day broke, and saw him safe from that place. A common monkey extended his protection to a man who was ready to betray him to death. Is it not surprising then that you, the son of the Lord of Day, and king of all the *vanaras,* refuse to follow the duty of protecting one who seeks refuge - the duty observed by one of your own clan?

"I am a man, born of the line of Raghu. My father was king Dasaratha, who had grown in ruling his subjects righteously for sixty thousand years. From Visvamitra, Vasishtha and other great sages, I have learnt the mysteries of *dharma.* I am connected by marriage with King Janaka, the master of desireless action. People call me Rama, the Incarnation of *dharma.* I have laid down the rules of conduct for all. I must practise them aright. I must show others the way. Now if I, even I,were to inflict pain on one who has taken refuge in me, where is the limit to the evil that men may do? Ravana may, if he likes, condemn to death those that do not deserve this fate. But how can one like me ever dream of it? I know not to what species one belongs who forsakes the man who seeks sanctuary."

"But you may say, 'The dove had not studied the *Sastras.* It is not proper that, merely to follow the dove's example and for no other reason, we should do this thing.' Let me place before you the words of Maharshi Kandu, the son of the great Kanva. He comes of a noble race; he knows the truth of things; and he speaks truly the truth he knows; his words are those of a well-meaning friend and they are supported by the holy scriptures. They are not the product of his fancy. As the hymns of the *Rigveda* are transformed into those of the *Samaveda* by a change of note, even so Sage Kandu but formulates the *dharma* that has no beginning. He who lives up to his words reaps the rich reward that awaits him who follows the *dharma* taught in the Veda. His counsel is pregnant with many meanings, easy to remember and succinct. You have not heard it and hence the confusion in your mind.

The seeker for refuge need not feel friendly towards the protector nor express friendship in word or conduct. He need not be endowed with all the excellences that the doctrine of refuge demands of the seeker. It is quite enough that the supplicant should join his palms in prayer, as a gesture of surrender. Grace descends on him at once and all sorrow falls away. The one sure, swift means to secure the Lord's blessing is joining one's palms in prayer. This YOGA MUDRA (gesture of únion) easily brings under control one who is free. How can it fail to control the Lord who is bound and given over to the hands of his devotees?

"Even if one does not join the palms in prayer, it is enough if one announces that one is helpless and needs help; or if one utters words that sound like prayer."

"Even if these three elements are absent, turning in the direction of the Saviour is enough. Let the suppliant be our direct foe, yet may we not harm him. As *ahimsa* is the highest virtue, so compassion is the essence of all *dharma* and must be preserved."

"What is gained by parading our valour before one who seeks sanctuary? Should we not rather be valiant before our enemies? He who seeks our help may give way to anger that his desire is not fulfilled at once; he may be in the grip of fear at the thought of his faults; he may be intent upon securing his purpose without caring whether it is now or later; he may be proud and unbending at the very moment of taking refuge, or impenitent for former sins; he may be disgusted with life and eager to free himself from the bondage of the body; he may long for liberation as the effects of his *karma* have come to an end; he may be powerless and helpless and know not where else to go; he may utter the words 'I surrender' in jest or in deceit; he may utter the words with hatred in his heart.

In every case, it is the duty of one who has faith in the code of *dharma* and who has a steadfast mind to give up his fleeting life-breaths, if need be, and gain the eternal merit of saving the suppliant. Failing in this duty, the wise man commits a blacker sin than the common man. So one should stand between a broken man and his sorrow, even at the cost of one's body, wealth and life. Whether from fear of harm from the suppliant or his comrades, whether from ignorance of law or from hope of some gain from the suppliant's foe, whatever the cause, if one fails in his duty of protection, one incurs the scorn of all men here and forfeits all chance of salvation hereafter.

Not only this. When one can, but does not, save the suppliant and watches his suffering and death at the hands of his enemies, one loses all the merit one has accumulated till then and it passes to the seeker of refuge. Heavy and heinous is the sin of failing to help the suppliant for protection. It leads one to hell. It brings one infamy and dishonour on earth. It saps one's strength and prowess. I shall tread the path of Maharshi Kandu. I have pledged myself to establish *dharma* on earth and I am bound to act in accordance with it. All beings will commend this course of action, which destroys sin and assures one a place in heaven.

(Yajnavalkya lays down that the roots of *dharma* are the SRUTI; the SMRITIS, the conduct of the good, one's own inclination and one's final choice after long and careful deliberation. Here Sri Rama bases his decision on all these authorities. SRUTI supports him when he says, "We should not betray one who seeks sanctuary even though he deserves to be slain." In citing the words of Maharshi Kandu, he seeks the sanction of SMRITI. The example of the dove gives the line of conduct followed by the good. His own inclination and interests are served by drawing away a mighty hero from the enemy's camp into his own. These four reasons established beyond question the doctrine of protecting those who seek refuge. Finally, he comes to the fifth condition laid down — the decision reached and the pledge taken after searching enquiry and deep thought).

"The seeker after the highest perfection has to practise repeatedly the other means prescribed by the books; but not so with the method of surrender. It is quite enough if the surrender of self is made to me but once. Even then it is not necessary to express it in word or by act; submission with the mind will do. Let a man but think once, "I am yours; service to you is my sole reward." This prayer is enough. I shall then stand between him and any evil that threatens from any being. This is my *pledge,* never and in no circumstances to be broken. (Here it is suggested that liberation is freedom from fear. This is what one seeks and gains through the knowledge of Brahman. For, Yajnavalkya says to Janaka, "Verily you have attained the state of fearlessness"). This gift of fearlessness, I give to those also who come with him who seeks refuge in me."

(We have the saying of the wise that man, beast or bird attached to a devotee of Vishnu will by virtue of this attachment attain the supreme world of Vishnu).

As Rama spoke, Sugriva's suspicion was at an end; his face shone clear; trust and faith in Vibhishana filled his heart.

Then Sri Rama said to him "Sugriva, this Vibhishana took you as his intercessor with me and prayed to you to announce to me his arrival here. He desired your help to bring him to me. Now, if you go yourself and bring him here, the grievous sin of making him wait so long would be wiped away. Of all the *vanaras* who love me, you are the dearest to me. Vibhishana, forsaking kith and kin, has declared before us his helplessness. I who hold that show of friendship is enough for me, I have given him sanctuary the very moment that he said, 'I surrender'.

"Do you hesitate, wondering 'How shall I go to him and invite him here — I who doubted him and stood in his way?' It is no great thing that we offer protection to Vibhishana, for he is righteous. It would be something if we freed from fear of Ravana, the cruel. If we save Vibhishana, we save with him only the four *rakshasas* that have accompanied him. But if we save Ravana, we would save along with him the entire *rakshasa*-race. That would indeed be an immense gain. Do you not share whatever glory and happiness may come to me? Why do you entertain such doubts about Vibhishana? Why, if Ravana himself should come to me straight and, without restoring Sita, pray for my protection, I am prepared to grant it to him. If this is not Vibhishana, but Ravana in disguise, even then I would give him sanctuary. Do not come and tell me that this is not Vibhishana, but Ravana himself. Whoever it is, bring him quickly here!''

Hearing this, Sugriva marvelled at the supreme love that Sri Rama had for himself and Vibhishana that took refuge in him. Rama disregarded every fault of his; he pacified his old comrades who had so long opposed his wishes; he argued with them and convinced them that he was right; he was ready even to receive Ravana if he came; such was his love. The *vanara* king, amazed at Rama's infinite goodness, said ''Rama, when one thinks of the endless auspicious qualities that are yours by nature, one ceases to wonder at your action. Knowing the mysteries of *dharma,* you extend your protection to all your myriad servants. You are ever intent upon making others happy, desiring nothing for yourself. It becomes you and you alone to speak and act thus. You have too the ominpotence to perform what you promise. You have taken birth among men only to establish the reign of *dharma.* Any one of your countless excellences is quite enough by itself to save those who seek sanctuary in you. No wonder your grace becomes limitless when all these excellences are found together and harmoniously combined. You may say, ''Why praise me? Only if you are satisfied in mind, we shall accept Vibhishana. ''Even if I said that this *rakshasa* must be cruelly punished, I know in my hearts that he is innocent.

''There are other weighty reasons for your noble action. I now recognise the pure motives that impelled Vibhishana to come to us. The arguments of Maruti and yourself, the gait and dress, the words and expression of Vibhishana, these have convinced me. I have sinned heavily by distrusting Vibhishana, in my ignorance. Now that the truth is known, let not a single moment be lost in granting his prayer. He prayed to us, cruel suspicious creatures, to intercede with you on his behalf. And you, O Lord! have taken all this trouble only secure for us the name and fame of being intercessors for Vibhishana. Let the new-comer Vibhishana soon find a place among your devotees and serve you to his utmost.''

Sugriva prayed that Vibhishana should attain the highest bliss that any creature can hope for. He also wished that he and his comrades should attain the bliss of being the friends of this great new devotee of Sri Rama. "Lord", he prayed, "this devotee who knows the means to attain the Bliss Supreme, let him be our friend."

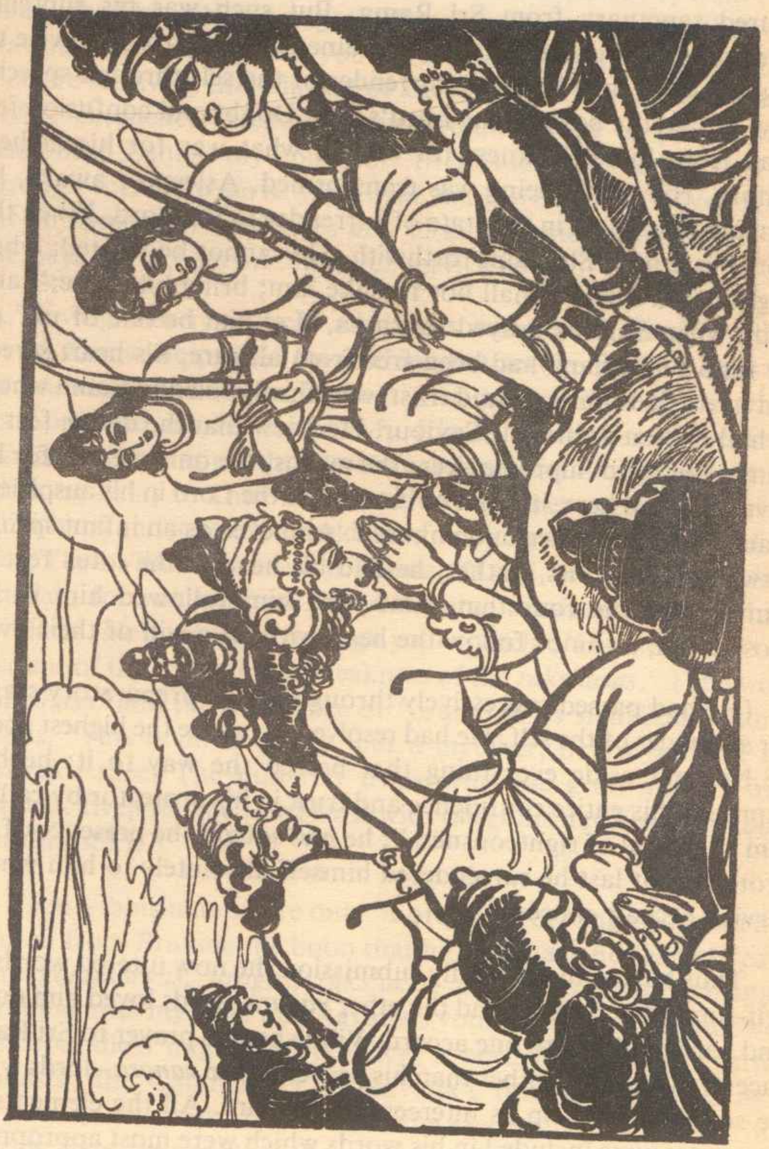
Then, the king of the *vanaras,* went to Vibhishana and cried, "Most fortunate of mortals! Forgive us this long delay. Raghuvira has granted you the sanctuary you sought. Fear no more. He has bidden us to bring you to him." Rama listened. He has pushed aside the obstacles raised by the monkey-warriors in the way of his grace. He had pledged his protection to the seeker. He would brook no more delay. What would happen if per chance Sugriva were to change his mind again? Hence, even as Indra welcomed Garuda with open arms, he advanced with alacrity to welcome Vibhishana and accept him as his own.

CHAPTER 19

VIBHISHANA'S SERVICE

EVEN as he desired it, Vibhishana received the grace of Rama and the gift of freedom from fear at the hands of all created beings. The *rakshasa* had heard of his auspicious qualities and resolved to serve him. Now seeing with his own eyes that Sri Rama's divine excellences exceeded a million-fold the reports he had heard, he bowed in deep devotion at the feet of Raghava. He realised the highest goal of life, having adopted the means that freed him from all danger and misery. His exhaustive and deep study of the *Vedas* and *Sastras* and his maturing wisdom bore fruit that day.

The intimate counsellors of Rama stood close around him, but the most important among them made room for Vibhishana to take his place before Sri Rama. Noting all this carefully he saluted Raghuvira with the utmost reverence even from afar. Finding that his stance in the sky did not give him freedom to stretch himself at Rama's feet, he alighted on the earth. Why should he bend low and pray before Rama even after winning his heart's desire, the final freedom from fear? The divine perfection of Sri Rama's form, face and excellent qualities filled his heart with ecstasy. Only his senseless



body fell at the feet of the Lord. There was no motive behind this act of adoration. Again, it was only Vibhishana who sought and secured sanctuary from Sri Rama. But such was his supreme devotion that even his followers attained the reward of service to Raghava. Till then he made surrender of the self through speech. Now he laid the body at the Lord's feet. Doubt and confusion fell away from him. He knew for certain what was for his highest welfare. His whole being was transformed. Asleep or awake, he remained steadfast in the state of surrender to the Lord. When the monkeys cried, 'Slay him forthwith. He cannot be trusted; when Raghunatha said, 'I shall not forsake him; bring him here;'' and again when Sugriva prayed to Rama, 'Let him be one of us;' all the time Vibhishana had been free from all care, his heart serene and unruffled. His love and trust were firmly fixed in Rama whom he had chosen as his sole Saviour. He knew that the divine feet of Rama, the Lord Supreme, were the means, the only means, for his salvation. And here, in front of him, stood the Lord in his auspicious beauty shedding grace upon himself. And even as an infant springs forward to clasp its mother, he laid his head at the lotus feet of Rama. And the four that came with him followed him in his prostration, as limbs follow the head without a will of their own.

(He had passed successively through all the preparatory stages for surrender of the self. He had resolved to pursue the highest good; he had put aside everything that barred the way to it; he had expressed his entire confidence and trust in his protector by calling him "the soul of righteousness"; he had sought the presence of his protector; at last he surrendered himself absolutely to him whose service he had chosen).

Thus having made bodily submission, he now uttered words of self-surrender. Sugriva and the other *vanara* - lords loved him much and trusted him with one accord. Vibhishana's prayer to Sri Rama face to face was no other than his prayer to the *vanara* - lords when he sought their help as intercessors for him. All the elements of surrender were included in his words which were most appropriate as they were addressed to Sri Raghuvira who had both the power and the grace abounding to protect him. Those same words which once roused anger and disgust in the hearts of Sugriva and his friends, now threw them into an ecstasy of joy; I am the younger brother of Ravana. I have been insulted and disgraced by him. (This announced his pitiable plight). Since you have declared that even Ravana merits your grace, you are indeed the Saviour of all beings. You are the living embodiment of knowledge, power and every other divine excellence. Hence I have sought refuge in you. I have renounced Lanka, my home, my friends and all the wealth I got through them. To serve you is for me the height of sovereignty, the enjoyment of all desires and bliss supreme in this world and the next. I pray for nothing but service to you''.

Having thus renounced all desires and placed all his burdens on Sri Rama, he prayed for nothing but service to the Lord - the service which he counted as the highest bliss. And to this servant, his Lord and master said, ''My friend, the moment you said, 'surrender!' it was my duty to have welcomed you. Forgive me for this long delay.'' Thus Sri Rama brought peace to the heart of Vibhishana and joyously beheld him for a long while with unwinking eyes. Then Vibhishana said to Rama, ''Lord, tell me what service I can do for you with my body?'' Rama answered, Let us think of it later. Now serve me through your speech. ''Let me have a true account of the strength and weakness of the *rakshasas*.'' (The word *'rakshasa'* and the avoidance of 'your clan' is significant. Rama means, 'This is no *rakshasa,* but a member, like myself, of the Ikshvaku race. The butterfly transforms the grub into its own likeness. Even so, the Lord forthwith raises his devotee to equality with himself).

Then Vibhishana spoke out, ''Lord, king of kings! Ravana has secured from Brahma the boon that he need have no fear of death from *gandharvas, uragas, rakshasas* and other created beings. Kumbhakarna my elder and Ravana's younger brother, is endowed with boundless might and potency; a hero like Indra in battle. Prahasta, the Commander of Ravana's forces, is famous as a warrior. he worsted Manibhadra, the General of Kubera, in the terrible fight that took place on Mount Kailasa between Ravana and Kubera. Indrajit, the son of Ravana, can keep up a ceaseless shower of arrows. And none can pierce his armour. He has won the favour of Agni by oblations. And in consequence, when he arrays his forces and stands at their head with bent bow, he is invisible, while his arrows deal death to his foes. Mahodara, Mahaparsva, Akampana and the other leaders are the peers of the World- Guardians in prowess. There are fourteen crores of *rakshasas* in Lanka, whose diet is flesh and blood and who can assume what forms they will. With these at his back, Ravana opposed the World-Guardians and put them to rout. The hosts of heaven who came to help them fled in terror before Ravana."

Rama, of unshaken fortitude, listened to the words of Vibhishana and considered calmly the steps to be taken. Then he said, "I have noted carefully what you say of the valour, might and daring deeds of the *rakshasas*. I shall slay in battle Ravana, his counsellors, kinsmen and armies, and I shall instal you on the throne of Lanka. Take my words as the truth. Ravana may hide himself in Rasatala, Patala or the other under-worlds; he may take refuge with Brahma, who granted him his boons; he cannot escape death, wherever he may be. I shall not go back to Ayodhya without first destroying Ravana and his sons, his kith and kin, his friends and armies. I swear it in the names of my brothers, Lakshmana, Bharata and Satrughna."

Vibhishana was troubled greatly that Rama swore to give him the lordship over Lanka which he knew to be worthless and had rejected in disgust. All that longed for as the highest good was service to Rama. Hence, he saluted Rama with the utmost reverence, knowing that Rama was the bringer of happiness to all beings, and knowing too the infinite value of self- surrender and service to Him. So he said, "Lord, I shall serve you, as long as life lasts, in destroying the *rakshasas* and capturing Lanka. Permit me to join your army and fight for you."

Rama clasped him to his breast with love and made him all his own, for he knew that Vibhishana desired no other reward than service to himself. So he replied, "You should enjoy the fruit that comes to you unsought and by the way. Do not cross my wish." Then he turned to Lakshmana and exclaimed, "Boy, bring me water from the sea. This friend of ours is mighty knower who knows himself through service to me. He never desired power or kingship.

But because he has my grace, the love I bear him should yield golden fruit; and you should see that he enjoys it. Lose no time in crowning him lord of Lanka and ruler of the *rakshasas.*"

THE INSTALLATION OF VIBHISHANA

Forthwith Lakshmana, as bidden by Rama, fetched water from the sea and surrounded by the monkey-heroes and in the presence of the monkey-hosts, installed Vibhishana, the supreme devotee, as the Lord of Lanka. The monkey-hosts witnessed the boundless compassion and yearning of Rama towards his devotees and rent the air with shouts of joy, "Good! Good!".

(The crowning took place in the presence of the monkey-lords, so that Vibhishana might not disclaim it later on and Rama bound himself publicly to carry out his promise without fail. And this was done *at the bidding of Rama*. This makes it clear that Vibhishana accepted the crown only because he could not disobey the command of his chosen Master).

Later, Hanuman and Sugriva took Vibhishana aside and said, "Friend, now are we to cross this waste of waters, the realm of Varuna? It is not only ourselves, but these countless monkeys that we have to take over to the other side."

Vibhishana replied, "Let Raghuvira throw himself at the mercy of the Lord of the Ocean, who will then be moved to suggest a suitable plan. This vast and unplumbed watery waste was dug by the sons of Sagara of the Ikshvaku line. The Lord of the Ocean is a kinsman, at it were of Rama, and will assuredly help him at need. The Ocean-king is not one who forgets a favour."

Vibhishana, of ready resource, gave this advice and Sugriva and Hanuman took it to Rama. He in turn was much pleased with it, since virtue was his very nature. Though he could accomplish unaided whatever he willed, he wished to pay due respect to the timely advice of Vibhishana. He turned to Sugriva with a smile and said, "Sugriva! Lakshmana! I like this suggestion of Vibhishana. Sugriva is famed for his intelligence; and you are past masters in planning. Let me know what seems to you expedient, after mutual consultation."

They clasped their hands in reverence and said, "We have no other resource left to us. What Vibhishana suggests is easy and conducive to our welfare. Hence, we both approve of it. Neither gods nor demons can approach Lanka without building a causeway across this terrible ocean. The words of Vibhishana, expert in counsel, are true and acceptable. Therefore, let us make no delay. Pray to the Ocean-king. There is no other means for us and our armies to reach Lanka, the island ruled by Ravana."

Then Sri Rama laid himself on a bed of holy grass. And he shone like the blazing fire in the sacrificial pit.

CHAPTER 20

RAVANA SEEKS TO WIN OVER SUGRIVA

THEN Sardula, the *rakshasa,* came to the sea-shore and beheld the forces of Sugriva. He was the secret emissary of the wicked Ravana. (The ruler of Lanka was wicked because he broke the rules of kingly polity to send his emissaries at the wrong time). Sardula observed the army carefully from all sides and, going quickly to Ravana, cried, "Your Majesty, a huge army of monkeys is marching towards our Lanka. Encamped on the sea-shore, it covers a space of ten *yojanas* and looks like another ocean. Rama and Lakshmana, the sons of Dasaratha, armed with noble weapons, have come in quest of Sita. I had only a general view. It is for Your Majesty to find out the whole truth. Send out messengers to bring you news as soon as possible. Force cannot avail against Rama. Let us try, in suitable ways, the other means of alliance, gifts and dissension". Ravana listened, considered all that he had heard, decided what he should do and, sending for Suka, a master of clever speech, said, "Suka, go at once to Sugriva and deliver him this message of mine, correctly, sweetly and courageously : 'Your Majesty, you are the son of the Lord of Day. Mighty beyond compare, you were begotten on earth by the *vanara*-hero, Riksharajas, the grandson of Brahma. Thus you are my kinsman. You have nothing to gain by depending on Rama; you have nothing to lose by giving him up; nor again do you gain anything by making me your enemy. Moreover, Vali is one of my dear friends; and so you stand to me as a younger brother, and it is just and proper that you should join me. If I carry away the wife of Rama, how does it concern you? What do you lose thereby? You are no fool; think deeply over what I have said and take your way back to Kishkindha. You may not like giving up an action once begun. But remember, neither gods nor demons can raise their eyes and look at Lanka. Do you think mere men and monkeys can set foot in it?"

Forthwith Suka took the form of a bird, crossed the ocean and, standing in the sky above the monkey-army, delivered to Sugriva the message of Ravana without missing a word. Meanwhile, the monkeys sprang up into the sky, caught Suka, hit him hard, and began tearing his flesh and breaking his bones. Unable to bear this assault, Suka fell down from the sky. Even then the monkeys tortured him and he cried, "Alas, Rama, call these back. Is a messenger to be slain? He who speaks his own mind, not the messenger of his master, he is no true messenger and he alone deserves such punishment." Hearing these piteous words, Rama said to the monkeys. "Slay him not." At once the *rakshasa* rose into the sky and disregarding the torments he had suffered at the hands of the monkeys who broke his wings, he cried, "Sugriva, mightier than the mightiest! What is there for me to tell you? Consider deeply your own strength and the prowess of Ravana, the terror of the worlds. If I take no answer back from you, Ravana will surely slay me."

Hearing this, Sugriva, of matchless might and courage, sent this reply to Ravana : "Oh! Rakshasa! you are no friend of mine. How dare you call yourself my brother? There is no reason why I should pity you. I have received no benefit at your hands nor do I love you. Being the foe of Rama my friend, you are my enemy as well. Further, as the friend of Vali, my enemy, you are my enemy as well. Hence, even though you have not offended me directly, this is reason enough for slaying you as Vali was slain. I shall slay you and your sons, your cousins and kinsfolk and have your capital reduced to ashes with my myriad of monkeys. Fool! For your offences your followers too will be destroyed. The gods and heavenly rulers may guard with the utmost care; yet, Rama will not let you escape, you may think that Rama can do nothing to you if you flee from Lanka. But whether you hide yourself in the orbit of the Sun or seek shelter in the worlds beneath, wherever you may go, you cannot escape him. You being the foe of Rama, none in all the worlds, no *rakshasa, pisacha, gandharva, asura or deva,* none dare offer protection to you. Am I to be frightened by the threat that you will kill me, as you killed Jatayu, for taking the side of Rama? Are you proud of dealing a death-blow to the vulture, old in years, infirm in every limb? All this won't pass current with me.

"You may say, Rama could do nothing when I carried away his wife. And what can he do now? Well, if you had attempted the deed when he was there to protect her, then you would have known what he was capable of, why so much? It would have been enough if Lakshmana was there. You are yet to realise the offence you have done to Rama by stealing his beloved wife. You are yet to know the might of his wrath. What a world of harm have you brought upon yourself by taking Sita away from her home and keeping her a prisoner! Immensely mighty, highly intelligent, immovable even by the Gods, the finest flower of the Ikshvaku race, such is Rama, but you are unaware of his real nature. His arrows will soon drink up your life."

Then Angada, the son of Vali, cried fiercely, "Your Majesty! this is no messenger, but a spy sent by the enemy to discover our secrets. There is no sin in slaying him. Staying here, he must have noted everything worth knowing about us. He should not be allowed to go back to Lanka. Seize him quick. Sugriva agreed and the monkeys sprang up into the sky, caught hold of Suka, heedless of his cries of agony, bound him tight and tortured him cruelly. Unable to bear this, he cried to Rama, "Son of Dasaratha, the monkeys have broken my wings and pierced my eyes. If I die at their hands, the burden of all my sins from the time of my birth to this moment will have to be borne by you." At those piteous words of Suka, Rama said to the monkeys, "Let him go in peace." They drove him to the southern shore of the ocean and left him there.

CHAPTER 21

RAMA'S WRATH WITH THE OCEAN-KING

THEN Rama spread sacred grass on the sands and laid himself on it. Though born of a line that offered refuge to all beings, yet he clasped hands of prayer to the Ocean-king. With eyes turned to the east and head resting on his right as a pillow, he lay facing the waters like one vast ocean beside another. No one dare approach him. Brought up in luxury by King Dasaratha, his delicate body lay stretched on rough stones. Alas! he the refuge of all the worlds, he was now reduced to seek refuge with the Ocean-king. When Rama was in his seat on high, as Mahavishnu in Vaikuntha, and when he came down to Ayodhya as a man among men, this arm was brilliant with curiously wrought ornaments of gold and precious gems. The arm was smeared of old sandal, aloe, saffron and other aromatic stuff, in various patterns, during bath and decoration by the fingers of noble ladies richly be-jewelled. Thus adorned, it used to shine like the morning sun. Like the huge serpent Takshaka disporting itself on the flooded Ganga, it used to rest on the fine bed filled with swan's feathers. It was the arm on which Sita used to rest her head as on a pillow. Like the bolt across a fortress-gate, it barred the approach of enemies in the battle-field. It poured oblations into the fire of their grief and spread boundless joy among his friends. Long and round like the trunk of an elephant, it was the stay and support of all the world. It bore a scar caused by constant contact with the bow-string. It was hard and strong like the revolving pillar of an oil-press. It was the arm that had given away countless cows.

With this right arm as a pillow, Rama lay down and sought the favour of the Ocean-king. He who offered refuge to all created beings, Ramachandra, said to himself, "This day I will either cross the sea or meet my death. Controlling mind, speech and body in the prescribed manner, he propitiated and prayed to the Ocean-king."

(The women referred to above were noble ladies customarily employed in such work in olden days).

For three days and three nights did Rama lie on the sacred grass in the prescribed manner. (Though he was omnipotent, yet sought the help of the Ocean-king because he wanted to set an example of propitiation and prayer. He proved by his own practice his faith in the doctrine of self- surrender. As the Lord's devotees seek refuge in him, through the intercession of Mahalakshmi, so Raghava sought refuge in the Lord of the Ocean taking the rivers as intercessors. He could, if he chose, destroy all creation by moving his little finger; yet he wanted to show to the world that a king should try and exhaust friendly methods before resorting to force. He knew that he should not punish one who was not guilty). Even though with restrained mind and senses Sri Rama offered due worship to the Lord of the sea, the latter, blinded by ignorance, made no response. (Why did Rama's surrender to the Lord of the Ocean prove fruitless? A *brahmana* conducting the Rajasuya and such like rites not meant for him gains nothing. Even so, he seeks refuge in another must himself be helpless and unable to save himself. But Rama was omnipotent. Why should he seek another's help? As he was not qualified, he failed in his attempt).

Then Rama grew wroth with the ruler of the waters; his eyes were blood-shot. He was aware of the anger in his heart and, turning to Lakshmana with a smile, said, "This Ocean-king is mighty proud, is he not? He has not yet chosen to come out and meet us. Foolish people mistake a noble forbearance for mere weakness. If a man does not give way to wrath, or if he suffers in patience some offence, if he is open-hearted and soft-spoken, he is put down as lacking strength and skill. On the contrary, the boastful and cunning man, the man who is cruel and terrible and punishes indiscriminately the good and bad, this man is held in awe and respect. Conciliatory means cannot secure for us the fame won by valour or victory on the battle-field. This day shall my fiery shafts slay the monsters of the deep and cover its surface with their floating carcases and the maimed and mangled bodies of huge serpents and sea-elephants. I shall dry up with my fiery arrows the sea which is the home of conch and pearl, of fish and crocodile.

You may say, "This does not become you, who bears patience as a precious jewel; but even after resolving to dry up the waters, I humbly prayed to this Ocean-king and clasped his feet. This king looks on me as a helpless creature, me who can cross unaided his watery waste. Patience and forbearance are entirely out of place with such as these. He is but the watchman of a piece of water, the dwelling place of fish, crocodiles and serpents. Yet he clean forgets his smallness and think he is my equal and the king of Ayodhya and Kosala.

You may say, "This is not the time to lose patience." But this fellow deserves no kindness. *Rakshasas* abide in his bossom and, through long association with them, his mind has been warped.

"Lakshmana, I waited till now in the hope that, perhaps frightened by my angry words, he would make his appearance here. But still he does not come. So bring me my bow fitted with *guna*, so that I may bring to his senses this fellow without *guna*. (Here there is a pun upon the word *guna*. It means bowstring and also excellence). Bring me my bow with the three graceful bends, so that I might make this fellow bend and bow. (The sea offers a resting place to Adi-Sesha. Lakshmana, the incarnation of Sesha, was filled with pity for the sea and delayed so long to hand the bow to Rama. He noted it and said) "Son of Sumitra! Do you think proper to obey the words of your mother and not my words. Even so, what were the words of your mother when she parted from you at Ayodhya? 'Rama is hereafter Dasaratha for you; be not slack in the service of Rama, when you are with him in the woods.' (Now Lakshmana brought him the bow. Rama noticed it and said). Bring me my arrows too. (Lakshmana brought some arrows used in sport, but Rama exclaimed). Bring me arrows that are deadly and cruel even like those serpents that kill at sight. (Lakshmana asked him, "What use are these shafts to one who could cross the waters?" And Rama replied), This Ocean-king has not appeared before me and given me leave to build a causeway. Now it is too late, for I will dry up the waters to the last drop. (The arrows of Rama could reduce to ashes anything they are sent against. But if Rama can do so with a single arrow why should he call for more than one?

It might be that he desired to blot out the ocean from existence, or he spoke in wrath, unconscious of his real might).

This ocean was dug by the sons of my ancestor, King Sagara, and he behaves with me as an envious cousin. I will give him back the same treatment. What took sixty thousand men to dig I shall dry up single-handed. My monkeys shall trample under-foot the head of him who stands between me and my purpose. (He means that there is no need for a bridge across the sea. The monkeys can easily walk across it, if it is dry ground). This thing called unshakable till now, will quake and tremble before my wrath. This thing contained within its boundaries till now, I shall drive it to break all bounds and overflow the earth. Well, the *danavas* and Varuna himself cannot save it from this fate, do what they might." He grasped his bow, rolled his eyes in wrath and, blazing like the fire on the day of dissolution, bent his bow and drew the string to his ear. He placed keen shafts on it and, even as Indra the unapproachable shoots his *vajra,* he discharged his keen shafts at the ocean till the universe trembled in fear.

The shafts, swift and radiant, entered the waters and filled with fear the huge serpents therein. The waves, rising mountain high, dashed against the shore, roaring aloud and scattering on it crocodiles and other monsters of the deep. A dreadful storm began to blow. The rushing waters strewed the sands with conches, pearls, corals and gems. The water boiled and swirled, as the arrows emitted flames and smoke. The ocean overflowed on all sides. Huge serpents emitted sparks on fire from their eyes and mouths, unable to bear the arrowy conflagration. The *asuras* and the *danavas* in the nether world, were sorely afflicted. Their strength could not prevail against Rama's arrows. Waves, huge like Vindhya, Mandara and Meru, chased one another with a mighty roar and dashed against the shore the creatures of the deep. The waves swirled round, *rakshasas* and *nagas* were dazed, the corpses of terrible sea-monsters floated; it was a fearful sight. Rama of boundless prowess hissed in wrath; he bent his bow, with the intent to discharge irresistible weapons and drew the bow-string taut, when Lakshmana cried out in entreaty, "Brother, this fury becomes you not. Forbear,

Forbear". Rama paid no heed, when Lakshmana held firmly with his hand the bow Kodanda.

CHAPTER 22

BUILDING THE CAUSEWAY

RAMA sought refuge with the Ocean-king and prayed for his help to enable the monkey-troops to cross the sea. When the Lord of the Ocean failed to appear, he said to Lakshmana, "Bring me my bow." Even then the Ocean-king did not make his appearance. Then Rama troubled the water with his arrows. Even then there was no response. Rama, to frighten him still further, put on a vile of uncontrollable anger: "This very moment I shall dry you up to the nether most depth. The very name of ocean will cease to be. My arrows will parch the whole earth with not a touch of moisture anywhere. Dust, fine dust alone will remain, even if all the clouds of Indra join together and pour down rain for untold aeons. You may say, "when the waters are dried up, the underworld *patala* will be exposed to view, which none can enter. Then it is through the sky that you must take your way to Lanka. Why not do so even now? Why, waste your rage on me?" I answer, "The arrows from my Kodanda are enough to transport the *vanaras* to Lanka. But you have no idea of my strength and prowess. By association with the *danavas,* to whom you have offered a resting place, you have come to share their ignorance. You have no idea of what you suffer at the hands of the Brahmastra that I shall employ against you." So saying, he took an arrow that was never known to fail, even like the rod of Brahma (Brahmadanda), and placed it on the string after infusing it with the *astra* of Brahma, and sped it from the noble Kodanda. (Brahmadanda means the curse launched by Brahma or a comet with three colours and a head, unspeakably malignant, as the *Narada Samhita* would have it).

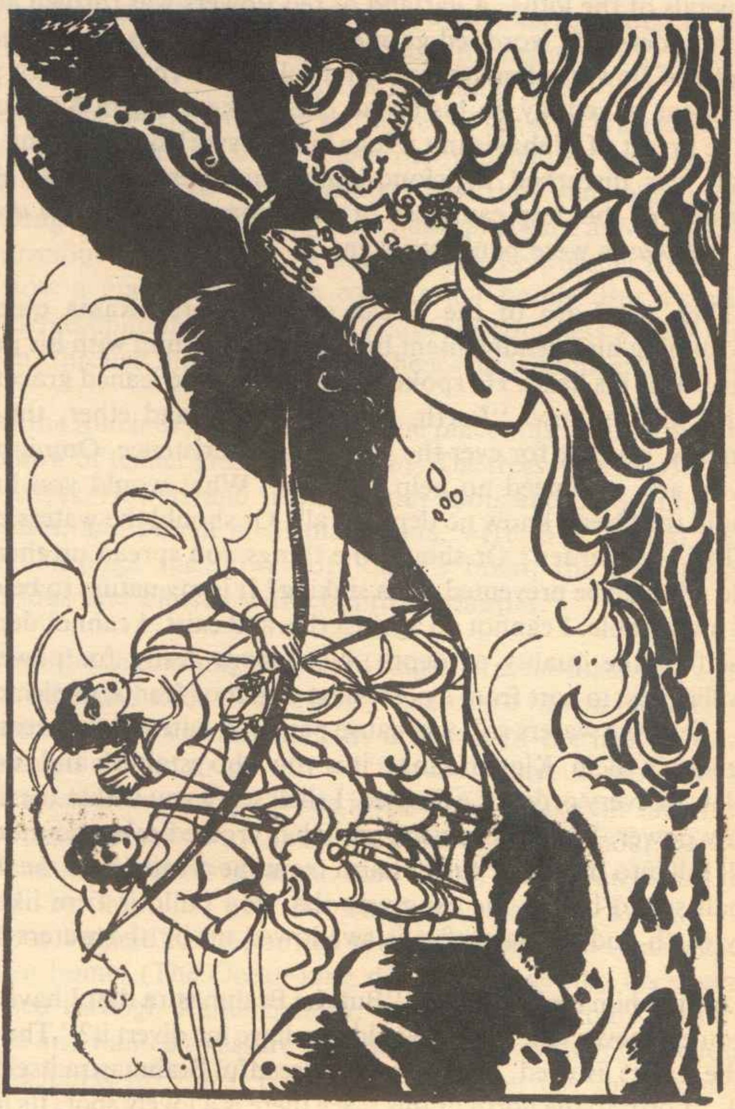
(Tirtha is of opinion that the Ocean-king was entirely unconscious of the great danger that threatened him. Rama could, if he chose, throw a bridge of arrows over the sea; or he could freeze the water thereof or dry it up, and make his troops walk over it.

He prayed to the Ocean-king only because he wanted to observe the traditional doctrine of surrender. Omnipotent though he was, yet he wanted to set an example to the world and hence sought the help of the Lord of the waters. But if the latter failed to respond, he has to pay for it).

Then the sky and the earth seemed to explode; huge mountains quaked to their foundations. Darkness descended on the earth; the quarters were hidden from view; lakes and rivers were troubled; the Sun and Moon were perversely mixed with the stars; the sky was filled with gloom. The Sun's rays were dull and feeble. Countless meteors glimmered here and there. Terrible thunderclaps, of the nature of Nirghata, fell from the sky with a mighty roar. (The *Brihat samhita* of Varahamihira describes the meteor as having a short tail and broad expanding head. *Nirghata* is the clashing of two winds in the sky and their falling to the earth).

Avaha, Pravaha and the other winds were displaced from their courses and wandered adrift. Frightful storms crashed down mighty trees, scattered cloud-banks to the winds, tore away mountain-tops and ground them to dust. Huge cloud-banks hid the sky and, dashing against one another with a mighty roar, gave rise to terrible thunder and lightning. All visible beings and likewise spirits that are unseen quaked in terror, roared like thunder and fell on the earth in deadly faint. The arrows of Rama caused the billows of the ocean to rise and swell with terrible speed. When the Brahmastra was shot at the waters, the waves surged up and it was frightful to see the *nagas, rakshasas* and other creatures dashed about on all sides. The ocean that was never known to cross its frontiers rushed over the earth one *yojana* all round and hid it from view. Rama would not punish further the waters that ran away from him in afright. He whose arrows drank up the life-breaths of his foes felt a twinge of pity for the haughty Ocean-king.

Then, like the Sun emerging from behind Mount Meru, the guardian deity of the ocean rose from its depths. Huge serpents with flaming mouths surrounded him. His body shone like an emerald mountain. He was adorned with curiously fashioned jewels made of gold known as Jambunada and Jatarupa and also with the



noble gems produced in the ocean depths. He resembled the Himalayas shining with many veins of ore. His eyes were lovely like the petals of the lotus. A garland of red flowers was thrown about his shoulders. He wore red garments and there was on his head a chaplet of flowers of many kinds and colours. A rope of pearls with a pendent of red lay on his broad chest, like the gem Kaustubha on the breast of Mahavishnu. Huge billows swirled round him. The ocean was disturbed by cloud-banks and fierce storms. Huge monsters of the deep came out of their homes above. The *uragas* and *rakshasas* were panic-stricken.

Then the Lord of the Ocean came towards Rama quickly, proclaiming his friendly intent by calling out to him with his palms joined over his head. He spoke to Raghava as he leaned gracefully on his mighty bow. "Earth, water, air, fire and ether, the five elements, observe for ever the laws of their existence. Omnipotent as you are, you need no help from me. What would you have? Should the Ocean know no depth at all? Or should the waters cease to flow and harden? Or should the things you spread on them to build a bridge be prevented from sinking? It is my nature to be deep and impassable. I cannot go against this and exist. I cannot deprive myself of the quality of depth. Nor, from desire for power or unwillingness to part from a possession or out of fear of punishment, can I keep the waters still and cause pain and harm to the creatures dwelling in them. King of kings, it is you who establish and sustain the law of every order of existence. I shall serve you within the limits of my power. Until the *vanara*-army has crossed over, no monkey shall fall into the sea or suffer harm from the creatures of the deep. I shall see to it that the causeway that you build is firm like the very earth and no part of it is swallowed up by the waters."

And to him replied Rama, "But the Brahmastra that I have shot at you can never fail. Where would you have me divert it?" The king of the waters listened, cast eye on the dreadful Brahmastra itself and said, "Lord! to the north of this place there is a lovely spot. Its name Drumakulya is famous even as you are. Some robbers make it their home. They come of the clan of Abhiras or Mahasudras and are frightful alike in looks and behaviour. Their very touch sends pangs of agony through me. Pray, direct at them and satisfy the *astra.*"

Rama did so and, turned the *astra* towards the place indicated. The spot where it fell like a huge bright thunderbolt became famous as Marukantara. Pierced by the arrow, the earth roared in pain, and through the cleft there sprang, from the nether world Rasatala, a stream of water. Vranakupa is the name given to it. There is difference between it and the salt water of the sea. The earth burst with a dreadful noise where the arrow touched it; and the water there was dried up to the last drop. Rama thus removed the curse that hung over the place, and gave it name and fame as Marukantara and precious boon besides. (A doubt may arise whether Rama who was now a man among men could grant boons. But Valmiki's considered opinion is that Rama brings the countless worlds under his sway through the power or truth, hence his wisdom and prowess).

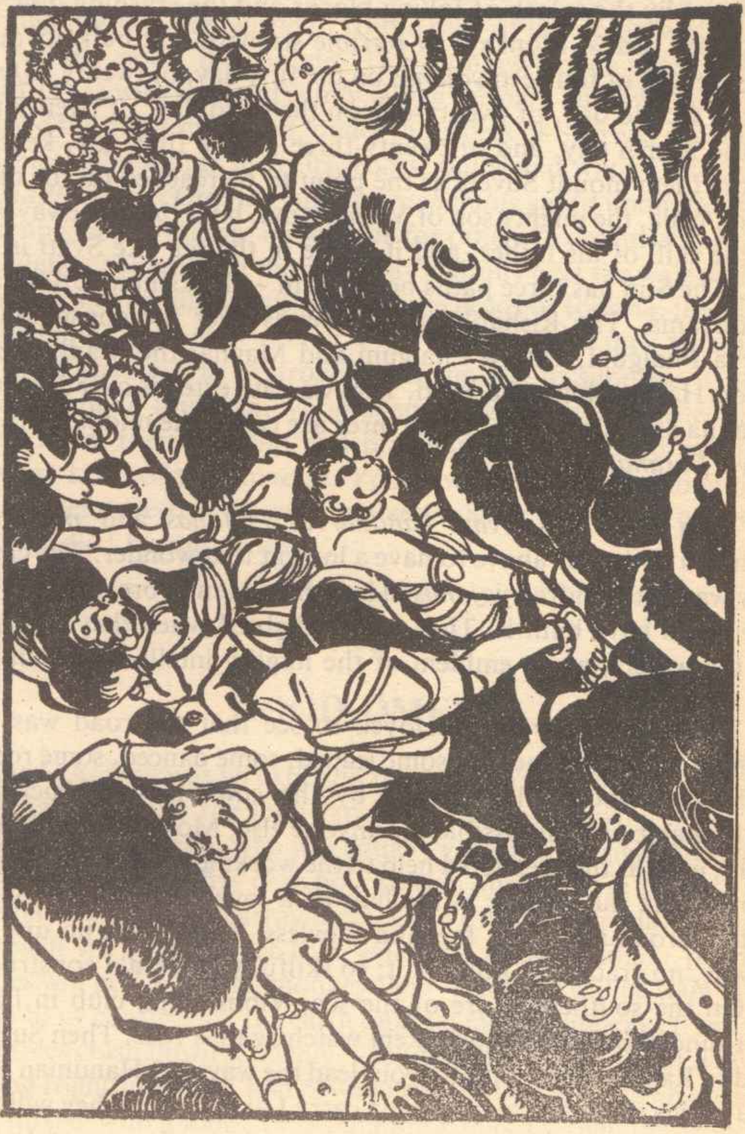
At the touch of Rama's arrow, the place was transformed into a meadow of tender grass dear to cows. The trees were heavily laden with leaves, flowers and fruits. Honey roots and bulbs, milk, oil, perfumes, and potent medicinal plants, were to be had in plenty there. Through the power of Rama's boon, the spot became salubrious and blessed with countless beauties.

Then the Ocean-king addressed Raghuvira, the master of all arts and sciences and said, "There is in your troop a *vanara* named Nala. He is the son of Visvakarma, the architect of the heaven-world. He granted a boon to his wife — "You will have of me a son like unto myself in everyway." Nala is thus the equal of his father. Let him construct a causeway across the waters. I shall honour him even as I would honour Visvakarma. And I shall see that any substance placed by him is not drowned or washed away." He circumambulated Rama, bowed low before him and went back to his own home. (The Ocean-king did right in getting his enemies punished through Ramachandra. Yet he was mortally afraid of Ravana and wanted to assure himself that Rama was mighty enough to bring him to his death. This explains his otherwise unaccountable delay — Govindaraja).

Then Nala stood forth and said to Rama, "I will throw a causeway over the boundless waters. The Ocean-king has spoken the truth. I have the same skill as my father. Verily nothing in the world is as effective as the use of force. Other policies like conciliation, gifts and sowing discord fail utterly when directed against one who knows no gratitude at all. This Ocean-king, of dreadful prowess, has made our path safe and shallow, because he is curious to see you build the causeway and because he is afraid of your heavy hand".

"Once upon a time, when my father dwelt on the mountain Mandara with my mother, he said to her, "You will have of me a son like myself in form and prowess." The Ocean-king has reminded me of it. What he says is true. I knew this secret before. But I thought that no one would believe me if I began this great task after proclaiming my ability myself. Hence I waited until some one else should speak of it. I can build a causeway across the ocean. Let the monkey-heroes bring me the requisite materials." Rama ordered accordingly. Thousands of monkeys ranged over mountain and forest. They uprooted trees of mountainous bulk and dragged them to the shore. Teak, *bilva, saptaparna,* mango and other trees were brought there, some with roots, some without, and some heavy with fruits, flowers, leaves and shoots. The lofty trees lay by the sea-shore, like the flag-staffs of Indra set up for a festival. Mighty monkeys tore up huge boulders like elephants and transported them to the sea shore. The Ocean, which was naturally rough there, rose to the skies when the trees, rocks and boulders were thrown on it. The monkeys stirred the waters to their depth. Some took with them long ropes to see that a causeway a hundred *yojanas* in length was laid straight across the sea.

Thus, while Nala built a pathway over the sea, the monkeys brought him huge rocks and wrought feats impossible for others in their desire to render him help. Some busied themselves with rods to measure the work done. Staff in hand, some monkeys supervised the work of the others. Some examined the causeway to make sure that it was smooth and even. Some searched out monkeys taking rest in the shade of trees and set them again to work. In pursuance of the orders of Sri Rama, countless monkeys helped to build the causeway with mountain peaks huge as cloud-banks and with logs and grass and flowering trees. (The flowers and grass were laid on the causeway to make the road smooth and pleasant). Many



monkeys, resembling elephants in rut, carried with speed of wind huge boulders and mountain peaks. The roar of the waves was drowned by the splash of falling blocks and the crashing down of mountain peaks. Monkeys of terrible strength and bulk joyously laid a length of fourteen *yojanas* on the first day, of twenty *yojanas* on the second day, of twenty-one on the third day, of twenty-two on the fourth day, and of twenty-three on the fifth day, keeping before them mount Suvela as the point to be reached on the other shore. Nala, the mighty son of Visvakarma, built the causeway with all the skill of his father, and it shone in the sea like Svati in the sky.(The Sun has three paths before him — Dakshina, Uttara and Madhyama. The Rishabha path extends over the constellations Purva Phalguni, Uttara Phalguni and Magha; the Madhya path covers Hasta, Chitra and Svati. The Aja path extends over Jyeshtha, Visakha and Anuradha. These three are called the middle paths — *Vayu Purana).*

Then hosts of *devas, gandharvas, siddhas* and *maharshis* gathered in the sky above to have a look at that wonder. The causeway was one hundred *yojanas* in length and ten in breadth. No one else could have built it. They were delighted when they saw it lie on the waters, as an emblem of the mighty intellect of Nala.

The monkeys were overjoyed to see that the road was laid without a hitch. Some ran, some leaped, some danced, some roared and some stood still, stunned by the construction which was unthinkable and impossible for anyone else. Monkeys, millions of them, even as they rendered help to the workmen, reached the other shore. Like the parting in the hair of a lovely lady, it lay on the waters broad and firm, fair and flawless. There were no ups and downs, no cracks, or holes in it; so skilfully had Nala constructed it. On the southern shore of the sea, Vibhishana, club in hand, surrounded by his ministers, kept watch against foes. Then Sugriva said to Rama, "May it please you, lead the way. Let Hanuman carry you on his shoulders and Angada carry Lakshmana. They will take you swiftly through the sky to the other shore. Rama and Lakshmana, fully-armed, together with Sugriva, led the monkey-troops, their faces lit up by the Goddess of Victory. The other monkeys came over, some along the middle and some along the sides of the road, while others waited till there was room on the causeway but some threw themselves into the sea and swam across. Others flew through the sky like Garuda. To the roar of the ocean was added the terrible noise they made. The monkey-troops crossed that dreadful sea with ease and safety, along the path laid by Nala. They reached the other shore and, under the orders of Sugriva, encamped in a place abounding in fruits, roots, bulbs and water. The gods, the *siddhas,* the *charanas,* and the *maharshis* gazed upon the work accomplished by Rama, impossible for others to dream of, praised him highly, for building the causeway skilfully over the waters. This causeway was an auspicious sign that the heads of Ravana, the terror of the worlds, were about to fall. They wished to hide their boundless joy until Ravana was destroyed. But, unable to suppress it, they crowded round Raghava, whom men and gods alike adorned, and offered him their worship and praise in the prescribed manner; "Rama! Lord of the universe. You have come down among men to save them! Destroy all your foes and rule for long ages, the broad earth girdled by the oceans."

CHAPTER 23

GOOD OMENS

RAMA, who was an expert in the science of signs and portents, was glad that the long-expected war was drawing near. He turned to Lakshmana, who was equally versed in the signs and their meaning and said, "My dear boy, station our forces in forests rich in water and fruits and array them in the form of Garuda. We now approach the great terror that will wipe away ordinary people. Heroes will perish. Bears, monkeys and *rakshasas* will be slain. The winds blow confusedly; the earth quakes; mountain-peaks tremble; huge trees crash down suddenly. Cloud-banks, of the hue of wolves bearing frightful shapes, and covered by vultures, pour down ghastly rain mixed with blood. (Varahamihira tells us that the ruin of kingdoms is foretold by earth-quakes at twilight, meteors falling and stars seen during the day, thunderbolts and rain mixed with wood, grass, and blood). The twilight sky is covered by cloud-banks of scarlet hue. Fiery blocks break off from the sun and fall on the earth. Cruel beasts and birds howl and cry helplessly in piteous tones, raising their heads to the sun. They speak of impending danger to the worlds. The moon at night is lustreless, yet burns the earth. Around the setting sun are seen rings, fiery red in the centre, of light red in the middle, and utter black without. Such terrible things unknown before are visible during he time of dissolution.

(If there are two rings round the sun, troops and armies meet with destruction; if three, kings die; if a ring is seen round the sun in the first quarter of the day, it bodes evil to all beings; if in the second, it means storm, rain and battle; if in the third it indicates good and happiness; if in the fourth it is sure to end in universal destruction — Kasyapa). Dark spots appear on the face of the sun, till now pure and flawless. (Except during the full and the new moons, Rahu should not attack the sun and the moon; again there should be no spots or cracks visible in the two spheres; if they are, it means utter ruin of kingdoms — Varahamihira). Stars are very dim; it seems as if the day of dissolution is at hand. Crows, vultures, and eagles are worsted by puny birds. Jackals howl fearfully. When the *rakshasas* and the monkeys engage in the battle armed with stones, spears and swords, the earth will be a miry mass of blood and flesh. Let us make our entry from all sides into this city of Lanka till now defended by Ravana from the approach of any one."

He was the embodiment of *dharma;* the hero of heroes; the extremely skilful and intelligent. His face bright with the thought of the coming battle, his splendour illuminating the space around, he set out towards Vibhishana and Sugriva and the monkey-heroes were confident that they would destroy their enemies. Roaring with joy, they set out to find a likely place for their forces to camp. Rama had half a doubt whether, with all their strength and valour, the monkey-forces would not be frightened and dispirited at the sight of the dreadful ocean and the fortification of Lanka. But he was now free from anxiety and filled with joy when he saw that they were eagerly looking forward to the battle. Intent on fulfilling his wishes, they jumped and roared, brandished their tails and lashed the earth with them in sheer joy.

CHAPTER 24

RAVANA INFORMED OF RAMA'S ARRIVAL

Like the full moon of the autumn, conjoined to an auspicious constellation, the monkey-host camped in a comfortable spot at the orders of Rama and enjoyed a spell of rest. The troops of Sugriva, boundless like the ocean, spread over the earth which trembled under the weight. There came to them from Lanka the sounds of drums, kettle-drums, and other instruments of martial music. Mixed with the roar of the *rakshasa*- forces, these dreadful sounds caused one's hair to stand on end. Filled with joy, the monkeys could not stand this and roared loud enough to drown the shouts of the *rakshasas*. Like huge cloud-banks roaring in the sky during the rains, the monkey-hosts could be heard all over Lanka.

At the sight of Lanka, brilliant with curious banners and flags, Rama's thought turned towards Sita with sadness "Alas, like the star Rohini in the cruel grip of Mars, my Janaki, with the eyes of a frightened deer, is held in prison here by the *rakshasas.*" He heaved a deep sigh. But reminding himself that this was inexpedient on the eve of battle, he restrained his grief, turned to Lakshmana, standing by, and trying to change his thoughts by descanting on the beauties of Lanka, said, "Boy, behold how beautifully Visvakarma has fashioned the city of Lanka on Trikuta hill! Like a thing of pure imagination, it touches the sky. With its towers and palaces this town looks like the sky covered with white fleecy clouds. Surrounded by forests and groves, rich in fruits and flowers, it shines like Chaitraratha, the garden of Kubera. Birds of many kinds sing sweetly here. Bees, drunk with honey, and cuckoos rest on clusters of flowers. I think that all flowers and fruits could be had in every season in this place. The breeze blows soft and pleasant." Thus did he praise the city of Ravana.

Then he arrayed his army according to the rules laid down in the art of war and said, "Let Angada and Nila take their places at the heart of this array. Rishabha on the right and Gandhamadana like an elephant in rut, on the left, will guard the flanks. Myself and Lakshmana will be at the head. Jambavan, Sushena and Vegadarsi will be in its stomach. Even as the Lord Varuna protects the western quarter of the world, Sugriva will guard the tail." (This shows that the army was arrayed in the shape of the bird Garuda). The hosts that shone like huge clouds in the sky, were thus protected by mighty heroes. Armed with peaks and huge trees, the monkeys were ready at any moment to destroy Lanka. They said to themselves, "We shall grind this city into dust by the huge boulders or by our bare fists."

Then Rama turned to Sugriva and said, we have arrayed our troops; now let Suka be set free."

Tortured by the monkeys and quaking in fear, Suka, like one half-dead, ran to Ravana and fell at his feet. The Lord of Lanka, noting his dismal state laughed and cried, "Did you fall into the hands of the wayward monkeys? It seems that you were in their power for a while. Why are your wings broken? What is the reply of Sugriva?" But Suka was dazed and could hardly think. Yet his fear of Ravana's wrath made him blurt out, "Lord, at your orders I went to the northern shore of the sea and delivered your message to Sugriva. Though my speech was sweet and mild, those monkeys, catching sight of me, sprang at me and trampled me under foot; in their mad fury began to break my wings. By nature they are fierce, malignant, cruel; it is impossible to have speech with them; much less to get a reply to any message. Raghunatha has come here seeking Sita; he is surrounded by hordes of monkeys who own the sway of Sugriva. Rama is a mighty hero who has already despatched Viradha, Kabandha, Khara and other foes. Throwing a road over the sea, he has crossed it as if it were a little puddle caused by the hoof of a cow. This wonder has never been heard of or seen till now. All our *rakshasas,* what are they before him? He stands there roaring like a lion, leaning upon Kodanda, his mighty bow. If such are his anger and prowess on merely hearing of yourself and your forces, I know not what will become of us when he meets us face to face. Monkeys and bears hide the earth from view, huge like mountains or cloud-banks. You may say, 'Go back in some other shape and have speech with them.'But it is utterly impossible to bring about reconciliation between the *rakshasa* and the monkey-forces any more than between the gods and *danavas*. Restore Sita to Rama before the army enters our city; or else be prepared to fight."

As he heard these words of Suka, sparks of fire flashed forth from the eyes of Ravana, as if they would burn Suka to ashes. "You wicked wretch! What did you say? I am to restore Sita, can I? Gods, *gandharvas, danavas* may face me in battle; all created beings may join together and try to frighten me; yet I will not give back Sita." When will my arrows cover the body of Rama like bees drowsily crowding on a tree heavy with flowers and foliage in spring? When will I discharge in a ceaseless shower the deadly arrows in my quiver, and drive him before me with the flames of my shafts as hunters of elephants chase them with lighted torches? As the rising sun swallows up the lustre of the other planets, even so I shall devour this monkey-host and the valour of this Rama whom you praise so highly. I am mighty like the ocean and swift like the wind. Rama, son of Dasaratha, is not yet fully aware of my prowess. Else, he would not have thought of facing me in battle. Well, the time has come for him to learn. He does not know that in my quiver lie my terrible arrows, all idle and hissing fiercely like venomous serpents. Else, he would never dream of standing against me in battle. Rama has never witnessed my prowess on the battle-field. The armies of the enemy are specious dancing-floor; my bow is a *vina;* my arrows are the plectrum playing on the wires. I make my appearance on the battle-field, bend my bow, draw it to the ear, twang it with a mighty noise; my foes quake in terror and cry piteously at my frightful form and the speck of my arrowy shower. Those whom my shafts torture howl in pain and agony. These dreadful sounds resemble the skilful execution of master of the *vina* when he rings upon the wires in the three octaves. Rama will have time to behold my feats of wonderful variety, impossible for others."

Indra who boasts of his thousand eyes, Varuna whose sons I have worsted in battle, Yama, the lord of departed ancestors, Kubera my elder brother, can they ever employ their weapons against me and hope to win? Why speak of this Rama, this mere man, the son of Dasaratha, who trembled and fled at the sight of me?

CHAPTER 25

RAVANA SENDS SUKA AND SARANA

TAKING human form, Rama came down into the world as the son of Dasaratha; he crossed the sea with his monkey-hosts and camped before Lanka like a spirited lion. But Ravana was nearing his end; and proud of his strength, he turned to his ministers, Suka and Sarana, and said, "How wonderful! the monkeys, millions in number, have really crossed this sea that was impassable till now. Rama has laid a road over the waters. Have such things been seen or heard of anywhere? Those in whom I place the utmost confidence may assure me all this is true; but unless I see it directly with my own eyes, I shall not believe it. Again, I must have a correct idea of the strength of the monkey-forces. Go and enter the enemy's ranks unknown to any. Who are the ministers in whom Rama and Sugriva place trust? Who stand in front on every occasion and in every mission? Who are the heroes there? How was his causeway thrown across the sea? Where is the enemy's army encamped? What is the strength and what are the weapons of Rama and Lakshmana? What steps are we to take? Who is the general that leads these mighty monkeys? Mark these things carefully and minutely and bring me true news with speed." (This Suka is not the *rakshasa* spoken of before).

So they entered the enemy forces in the shape of monkeys. They found it boundless, fearful, beyond count and enough to make one's hair stand on end. It was encamped on mountain peaks, dark caves, beautiful valleys, sea-shore, forests and groves. Some of them had crossed the sea, some were crossing it; some were about to do so; some had already selected comfortable quarters; some were asleep. Like another ocean, it was noisy, unapproachable, and dreadful.

Inspite of their disguise Suka and Sarana were found out by Vibhishana, who took them to Rama. "Lord, Suka and Sarana, these two before us, are the ministers of Ravana. They have come here from Lanka with intent to know and report everything about us." The *rakshasas* were sore afraid and despaired of going back alive. They clasped hand in prayer and cried to Rama, "Lord! Soul of mercy! We were sent by Ravana to discover and report to him all about your armies. Best and bravest of the line of Raghu! Saviour of those that seek refuge in you! Do with us as you please." Rama smiled at the stupidity of Ravana and calmed their fears. Compassion came naturally to the son of Dasaratha, adorned with every noble quality; he was ever intent upon doing the highest good to all beings. He was especially kind towards those who opposed him out of ignorance. Make any inquiries you like about me. Do the business you have come upon, obey the orders of Ravana and go back in peace. If there is anything left for you to see, take a second look at your leisure. Or shall I ask Vibhishana to show you everything clearly? Have no fear for your life, because you are in the hands of enemies. Captives in battle, those that have cast away their weapons and messengers should never be killed. Vibhishana! These have come to sow dissension among our forces by overtures of peace and bribery. But they pray to us for protection. Do not trouble them. Let them go in peace (Rama was not impelled to show the same kindness to the other Suka). *Rakshasas!* go back to Lanka and deliver correctly to Ravana these words of mine!

'It is up to you, your kith and kin and troops, to employ the strength that you relied upon when you carried away Sita, my beloved wife. At dawn of day you shall behold Lanka, its palaces and courts, its fortifications and *Rakshasa*-armies, being destroyed by my arrows. Even as Indra hurls his thunderbolt at the *danavas,* my dreadful wrath will hurl itself at sunrise against yourself and your forces.' "Go and convey this message to your master."

Suka and Sarana bowed before Rama, cried, "Victory to thee!" and went back to Lanka and reported to Ravana all that had happened. "Lord, Vibhishana found us out. Death would have been our just reward. But Rama,the radiant soul of righteousness, took pity on us, and let us go; Rama has followed the rule of polity that messengers ought not to be harmed. (This is a hint that Ravana's conduct was improper when he ordered Maruti to be put to a cruel death). Rama's valour is boundless. Let it not be supposed that he let us go out of fear of you. Rama, Lakshmana, Vibhishana and

Sugriva are like the regents of the world; mighty heroes of unshaken valour; past masters of every kind of weapon. And among them, Rama is the son of Dasaratha who helped the gods to defeat the *asuras*. Raghava is like a light lit in a lamp. He is endowed with the eight varieties of auspiciousness (Lakshmi). Lakshmana is his right arm. Sugriva, the brother of Vali of matchless valour, is his equal in every respect; he resembles his father Indra in prowess. The valour and brilliance of Vibhishana are not unknown to you. These four lords of men have now joined together in one place and are of one mind. It is nothing to them to tear up Lanka by the roots and fling it and all it holds where they choose. What need have they of help from other monkeys? Looking at Rama and his weapons, one would conclude that he by himself can destroy utterly this Lanka of ours. Why then should he trouble the other three for help?

"You may say, 'Rama may be a self-sufficient hero who needs no aid; but if I managed to destroy his forces, it would damp his enthusiasm.' Now the monkey-hosts, guarded by Rama, Lakshmana and Sugriva, are beyond the reach of the gods, *asuras* and Indras, all joined together. The anticipation of battle with the *rakshasas* has filled them with joy and they are ready to fight this moment. They are unshakable in their determination. We pray you seek not their enmity. Put away your wrath, call patience and forbearance to your aid and take Sita back to Rama."

CHAPTER 26

THE VANARA ARMY

THUS Suka and Sarana tender salutary counsel to Ravana, fearless of consequences. But the king of the *rakshasas* laughed in rage and cried, "Wretched fellows, I had no idea that you were such cowards. *Devas, gandharvas,* and *danavas* together may oppose me, all creatures may threaten me, yet I shall not restore Sita. You have been in the hands of the monkeys and, frightened out of your wits, you offer me this counsel as salutary. Is there any one who can face me in battle and hope to win?"

He spoke harshly and got up to the lofty terrace of his palace, with the height of many tall palm trees and white like fleecy clouds. With bloodshot eyes, he saw the sea, the mountains and the forests. The base of mount Trikuta was entirely hidden by the monkeys. Finding that the army was boundless and past count, Ravana exclaimed, "Sarana! Who are the heroes among these monkey-lords? Who are the mighty ones? Who are those that stand in front and lead the rest? Who are gifted with enthusiasm? Whose words does Sugriva follow? Who are the generals? Tell me the truth."

Sarana, who had carefully noted every detail about the army, replied readily, "Your Majesty! the monkey there, that never takes his eye off Lanka, but roars frightfully, he is Nila, the General. He is surrounded by many thousands of monkey-captains. With his war-cries reverberate Lanka, its palaces and mansions, and the hills and woods around.

There again, look at that other monkey that walks on his hind legs, with hands raised aloft. Often, he turns to Lanka and yawns. Huge as a mountain peak, golden-hued like the filaments of a lotus, he lashes the earth again and again with his tail and sets the quarters trembling. He has been installed as prince regent by Sugriva; he is Angada, the son of Vali and equal to his father in every respect. Sugriva loves him dearly. Even as Varuna is ever concerned with the welfare of Indra, this Angada has set his heart on the welfare of Rama. Maruti, following the counsel of Angada, discovered Sita. Maruti devoted to the interests of Rama, follows the orders of this youth. It is hard to defeat him, surrounded as he is by countless armies led by mighty heroes. Behold him challenging you to mortal fight even now.

Behind Angada stands another monkey-hero. He is the death of his foes; and this is Nala that threw the causeway across the seas. He leaps fury; he yawns dreadfully and stretches his limbs. Round him surge countless monkeys roaring like lions, a thousand crores and eight lakhs of valiant monkeys, dwellers in the sandalwood forests, follow Nala. He is resolved, with his own forces, to destroy Lanka.

And there walks a monkey of terrible prowess, white like mount Kailasa and moving about restlessly. He is Svetana, famed through the worlds for his intelligence. Most earnestly he prays to Sugriva for permission to pull down Lanka, this very moment. His master counsels patience, calms him and promises to grant his request a little later. And he returns sullen and wrathful. He marshalls his troops and keeps up their enthusiasm by skilful speech.

There stands another hero with a very long tail covered with hair red, white, black and yellow mixed together, and of the length of many *vyamas (* A *vyama* is the space of one's arms stretched out on either side). This is Kumuda the General. He is uncontrollable, easily offended. Eager to meet you in the battle. He too has resolved to destroy Lanka with the help of his troops. His kingdom extends along the banks of the river Gomati with its dense and lovely woods, as also over the mountain Sankochana and the forests around. He has come here at the orders of Sugriva. He is the lord of countless millions of valiant monkeys.

Look there, at that monkey, bushy like a lion, with his eyes intently fixed on our capital as if he would consume it to ashes. Yellow in hue and with eyes long and wide, he is the master of thirty crores of monkeys. He rules over the Vindhyas, Krishnagiri, Sakya, and Sudarsana mountains. The forces of this Rambha of dreadful prowess are ready to reduce Lanka to dust.

And there is another monkey who yawns often, pricks up his ears and shakes with wrath. He views things with the corner of his eye; now and then he glances at his tail and roars like a lion. He is Sarabha, king of the mountain Salveya. Mighty in strength and energy, he knows no fear. Death has no terror for him. He never turns his back on the battle-field and his swiftness is great. Forty lakhs of captains of the name of Viharas follow him.

There, in the midst of the monkey-hewes stands Panasa like a huge cloud-bank that hides the sky from view or like Indra surrounded by his gods. His roar is like the noise of mighty war drums. Of all the monkeys there that thirst for the moment of battle, he is the most terrible. The mountain Pariyatra is his kingdom. It is hard to face him in a fight. Fifty lakhs of captains obey him. There in the midst of the ardent monkey-army, big like another ocean beside the mighty ocean, Vinata moves about, huge in bulk like the mountain Dardara. The river Parnata is his abode; the sixty lakhs of troops are at his call.

Behold yonder the general Krodhana who defies you to fight right now. Every one among his troops is a mighty hero. With his body like a vein of red ore on the mountain side, Gavaya makes little of his brother monkeys but roams apart. He waits for you in furious wrath. Seventy lakhs at his back, he has sworn to destroy Lanka all by himself. Cast your eyes yonder over Sugriva, Angada and the other leaders and the forces at their command. Strong beyond imagination, they can assume what forms they will. No one can stand against them on the battle-field.

CHAPTER 27

THE VANARA ARMY *(Continued)*

BEHOLD the monkey-leaders who make light of their lives and use their strength, prowess and every other gift in the service of Raghava. That is Hara, who stands there with his immensely long tail. It is covered with hair many *vyamas* long and coloured curiously red, yellow, white and black. Note the radiance that emanates from him on all sides like the rays of the sun. Now, he tosses his tail aloft. Now, he drags it along the ground. He is terrible on the battle-field. He is followed by crores of captains, who drag lofty trees behind them in order to lay Lanka low. There again behold the bands of innumerable bears on mountains, valleys and river banks. One cannot count them, describe them one by one. Like a huge ocean, they are boundless; their bodies are dark like rain-clouds or mountains of black collyrium. Their prowess is irresistible. Cruel and fierce, they eagerly wait for the time when they will be let loose on you. And among them there shines of dreadful shape and dreadful eyes, like the god Parjanya in the midst of his clouds, he stands there, Dhumra, king of the bears. The mountain Rikshavan is his domain and he roams along the banks of the river Narmada.

Terrible like in form and more terrible than he in prowess, there stands his younger brother, like a huge mountain in bulk. Know him as Jambavan, the general, of matchless might, reverent towards his elders, jealous in battle. This wise one rendered special help to Indra in the fight of the gods against the *asuras* and secured rare boons; the bears that follow him fling huge boulders in a ceaseless shower on the foe. The very god of death cannot frighten them. Thickly coverd with hair all over, they make light of *rakshasas* and *pisachas* and put them to rout. In radiance they resemble Agni, the God of Fire.

And there stands Dambha, the general, ever about to take a tremendous leap, as if he cannot control his wrath. All the monkey-hosts gaze at him in wonder. His valour has been praised by Indra himself.

Sannadana there is rightly acknowledged as peerless among the four-footed creation; he is the oldest among the monkeys and their ancestor. At one stride he reaches the mountain one *yojana* away from him; he himself is a *yojana* in height. In the battle between the gods and the *asuras,* the latter tried their best to foil him and failed; as a general, he had achieved matchless fame. Again, the god of fair, begot him on a Gandharva maid, since the Gods wanted one like Indra in prowess to help them in the war against the *asuras*.

The general there, round whom millions of monkeys crowd, is Krodhana, who never boasts on the battle-field, but is strong and radiant. He is resolved to destroy Lanka with the help of his army. The mountain where he dwells abounds in Jambu trees. It is one of the favourite haunts of your brother Kubera; and this monkey-chief is its king.

Like a huge cloud-bank, tossed by a storm, stands Pramathi, the general whom none dare face in battle. He keeps in mind the ancient enmity between the elephants and the monkeys and drives away the elephants on the banks of the Ganges. (Once upon a time Sambasadana, the *asura* took the form of an elephant and troubled sorely the *rishis* and hermits. They entreated Kesari the monkey-hero to come to their help. And he fought the *asura* and killed him.

From that time there began a deadly feud between the elephants and the monkeys). He dwells in mountain caves. His enemies are ground to dust even as he walks. He takes delight in dashing and destroying trees with elephants and elephants with trees. Even as Indra reigns in Svarga, he holds royal sway over the mountain Usirabija on the banks of the Ganges. Lakhs of monkeys, proud of their valour and prowess, follow him. Look at the cloud of red dust raised by troops as they leap wildly in their uncontrollable wrath.

There behold Gavaksha, the general who is famed for his swiftness. When Nala threw a causeway over the sea, the millions of monkeys under Gavaksha surrounded him and pleaded for permission to demolish Lanka at once. Again, behold Kesari, the renowned monkey-leader. He rules over the mountain Kanchana. The trees on it are ever covered with flowers and fruits. The bees, drunken with honey, hum sweetly. The sun rejoices as he passes over it daily. *Maharshis* abide there ever in bliss. Under the sun's rays the mountain and the beasts and birds thereon shine with golden lustre.

And look there at Satabali, the monkey-leader. A hero among heroes, most intelligent, mighty in prowess, valiant beyond measure, he daily offers worship to the sun so that he may defeat you in battle. He counts his life as dust and is ready to lay it down in carrying out the wishes of Rama. Even as the *rakshasas* surround you, sixty thousand mountains of gold surround their Lord, mount Meru west of the sunset Mountain. And there, on that hill of gold, roam at will the monkeys that follow this leader. Red, white, yellow and brown are they in hue; sharp nails and teeth are their only weapons like lions they have strong teeth; they are unapproachable like fierce tigers; like huge serpents, they blaze in their wrath; their tails are immensely long; they are huge in bulk like elephants in rut and hard in body like lordly mountains they roar like the thunder of huge clouds; their eyes are red, and round and yellow, while their voices are terrible. Setting eyes on Lanka, they are eager to grind it to dust.

Gaja, Gavaksha, Gavaya, Nala, every one of them is the leader of crores of monkeys. There are too many brave monkeys that live on the Vindhya mountains. It is impossible to count them. "Every one of them is of boundless skill and prowess. In a moment they can reduce to dust the mountains on the earth. And one might mistake them for mountains."

CHAPTER 28

THE VANARA ARMY *(Continued)*

NOW Suka, thinking that Sarana's description was incomplete, began to supplement it. "Your Majesty! do you see those monkeys that tower aloft like elephants in rut or the tall banians on the banks of the Ganges or the lofty *sala* trees on the Himalayas? None can meet them in battle. Immeasurably strong, they take forms at will and resemble like *daityas* and *danavas* in might and the gods in valour. These number 21 thousand crores, many thousands of Sankhas and many hundreds of Brindas. They serve Sugriva and dwell in Kishkindha. They change their shapes at will and are born of gods and *gandharvas.*

Behold those two youths, like gods in beauty; they are the famous Mainda and Dvivida. The very gods are not equal to them on the battle-field. Brahma allowed them to drink of the waters of immortality. They too are resolved to destroy Lanka by themselves.

I pray you behold that monkey-lord that stands there like a lordly elephant in rut. When enraged, he troubles the very oceans to their depths. It is he that came here searching for Sita and entered your well-guarded capital. Once before you have seen him. And now, here he is again. He is the eldest son of Kesari and born of Vayu, the Wind God. He is famed on earth as Hanuman. He crossed the sea on a former occasion. He can assume what form he wills. The foremost of the *vanaras,* his strength and appearance are alike wonderful. Even like Vayu his father, he can go unhindered everywhere. One day while yet an infant in arms, he felt the pangs of hunger and, seeing the rising sun, he said, "I shall catch and eat this bright thing," and proud of his boundless strength he flew through the sky a distance of three thousand *yojanas.* But the scorching rays of Surya, whom gods, *maharshis* and *danavas* could not approach, were too much for him and he fell down in a faint on the mountain of sunrise. His jaw struck a rock and broke in consequence. That gave him the name Hanuman. I heard this tale from my elders. (Kesari dwelt on Kanakachala, the mountain. Its peaks are said to be three thousand *yojanas* from the solar orbit. The *Puranas* tell us that one lakh of *yojanas* lie between the sun and the earth. So this three thousand *yojanas* should be taken to stand for many. Further we read in the Uttarakanda of the *Ramayana* that Maruti fell, struck down by the *vajra* of Indra). It is impossible to describe his form, strength or prowess. He has resolved all by himself to lay your capital in ruins.

Behold the hero who sits so gracefully on his shoulders. Like a black rain-bearing cloud resting lightly on the peak of a golden mountain, he is endowed with the most lovely and auspicious form. He is Sri Rama. His eyes are like the petals of the red lotus, opening to the sun in a lovely pool. He is not like Anaranya and the others who fell before you in battle. Of the kings of the Ikshvaku line, he is the one whom his enemies dare not approach. All this the whole world knows. And to this Khara, Dushana, Trisiras, your enemy Vali, Kabandha, Viradha, Subahu, Maricha, Tataka and the others bear witness. Not only manliness, but the noblest *dharma* dwells in him. Nothing and no one can shake it; such is its firmness. (In the *Ayodhyakanda,* Jabali's atheistic arguments made no impression on him). He never transgresses the bounds of *dharma.* (Despite Bharata's pleas and protests, he did not break his pledge to keep the word of his father. Again, despite Sita's objection, he fulfilled the promise of protection to the *rishis* of the Dandaka forest. If during his fight with Khara, he drew back a little, it was simply because he had no space to draw the bow and shoot his arrows. Nor did he violate *dharma* when he slew Vali by craft. He had given his word to Sugriva and had to carry it out at any cost). Not only his manliness and virtue, but his mastery of every weapon, human and divine, is beyond measure. He knows well the use of *astra* of Brahma and the mystic literature thereon. He is the best of those who know the inner import of the *Vedas.* (He stands above Vasishtha and the others who claim to be the spiritual preceptors of the world). His arrows can tear to pieces the firmament; they can pierce mountains. Enraged, he is like the god of death. In prowess he equals the king of the gods. Since you carried away his beloved wife, Sita, while they dwelt in Janasthana, he is filled with uncontrollable anger against you. He has come here seeking you to give you terrible battle.

On his right side, there stands one who is of the hue of that pure gold, by name Jambunada. Broad of chest, his eyes aflame with wrath against you with dark clustering curls of hair on his head, stands Lakshmana, the younger brother of Rama. Nay, he is the very life and soul of Rama, extremely dear to him. A past master is he in the arts of war and government and in every accomplishment. In prowess he tolerates no equal; he has never known defeat; boundless is his manliness. Intelligent and strong, he is the right arm of Rama, his life-breaths coursing outside his body. When it comes to serving Rama, his life is nothing to him. He is resolved all by himself, to annihilate the whole *rakshasa*-race.

To the right of Rama there stands one surrounded by some of our *rakshasas.* He is Vibhishana, who has been declared as king over realms that you rule now. Sri Rama has no design on your kingdom, for all his wishes have been fulfilled and he has nothing to desire. Hence he has crowned Vibhishana as king of Lanka. He has come here to fight with you, moved by uncontrollable anger against you.

Between Rama and Vibhishana there stands one who is immovable like a mighty mountain. He is the ruler of the monkey-world, and has never known defeat. As the Himalaya soars above all the mountains upon earth, even so he stands high above the monkeys in his radiance, fame, innate wisdom, and learning, as also by his noble ancestry. Sugriva who rules his subjects from Kishkindha, adorned with caves and woods dwells with his chief ministers and generals in a mountain fortress curiously wrought and altogether unapproachable. There on his shoulders hangs a garland of gold adorned with countless golden lotuses. It is the envy of gods and men; it is the abode of the goddess of victory. (One who wears this garland can never be vanquished by a foe. Hence Rama was obliged to slay Vali from behind the trees). Slaying Vali, Rama gave to Sugriva this garland, Tara, that gem among women, and stable sovereignty over the monkey-world.

A hundred thousands make a lakh. A hundred lakhs make a *koti*. A lakh of *kotis* make a *sankha*. A lakh of *sankhas* make a *mahasankha*. A lakh of these make a *brinda;* A lakh of these make a *mahabrinda*. A lakh of these make a *padma*. A lakh of these make a *mahapadma*, A lakh of these make a *kharva*. A lakh of these make a *mahakharva*. A lakh of these make a *samudra*. A lakh of these make a *ogha* and lakh of *oghas* make a *maha-ogha*.

Now a *koti* of *maha-oghas*, a hundred *samudras*, a hundred *kharvas*, a thousand *mahapadmas*, a hundred *padmas*, one thousand *mahabrindas*, one hundred *brindas*, one thousand *mahasankhas*, one hundred *sankhas*, and one thousand *kotis* — this is the count, the ocean-like vastness of the monkey-army that stands round Sugriva. He has secured the help of Vibhishana, another vast ocean, with his four ministers. And this Sugriva challenges you to mortal fight. Boundless in strength and prowess and with boundless forces, he stands in splendour. Observe the monkey-army approaching us, blazing like a malificent planet. We should not suffer defeat at the hands of our foes; on the other hand, we should achieve victory. For this, I pray you to take the proper measures and that quickly."

CHAPTER 29

RAVANA DESPATCHES SPIES

RAVANA was a little taken back by what Suka and Sarana pointed out. The redoubtable monkey-heroes; Vibhishana, his brother; Lakshmana, the right arm of Rama and a hero of heroes; and Sugriva the ruler of the monkey-world endowed with terrible strength and valour — these stood round their lord and master Sri Rama. Then furious to hear his foes praised to his face he looked at Suka and Sarana as they stood before him with clasped hands and bowed head, and said, his words faltering with wrath, "What audacity! Here am I your lord and master able to make and to mar. You depend on him for everything; and yet you dare to speak words that are hateful to him. What is the rule of polity you follow, I wonder. Our foes have resolved to destroy us, and are here already to give us battle. And you praise them to the sky without reason. I ask you again, what is the rule of polity you follow? Would it not damp the spirits of our troops to hear praises of the foe on the very eve of battle? The essence of the science of polity consists in the way in which counsellors should behave to their king. And it is plain you do not know it. You have gained nothing from your contact with the teachers and practitioners of the science of government, with great men old in years, ripe in wisdom and righteous in conduct. Or else you have forgotten what you learnt. Or, instead of putting your learning into practice, you only carry it as a beast its burden. Only thus can I account for the name you have had till now as men of knowledge. I must thank my own accumulated merit that I rule this kingdom or even that I am alive, seeing that my counsellors are thus innocent of the science of government. Are you not afraid of losing your lives for speaking so harshly to me? Your welfare and your ruin tremble at the tip of your ruler's tongue. The trees in the forest can catch fire and survive; but never a wretch who has incurred the wrath of a king."

Then he said to himself, "To slay them out of hand is the proper regard for these wretches that praise my enemy. But when I think of the service that they have rendered to me, my anger subsides."

Then he said to them, "Wretches! this moment I dismiss you from my service. Go away somewhere. Let me not set eyes on you again. I have not forgotten the services you have rendered to me so far. Hence I refrain from slaying you. Your own ingratitude and the loss of my friendship will be for you a punishment crueller than death." Hanging down their heads in shame and giving the royal salute, "Victory, victory to thee!" they departed hence.

Then Ravana turned to Mahodara who stood by and said, "Send here at once some experts in the art of espionage and the science of polity." They came to him accordingly, bowed low, saluted him with "Victory, victory to thee!" and stood with folded palms, awaiting his orders. Knowing them to be faithful, valiant and devoted to him and at the same time entirely unafraid of any foe, he said to them, "Go and find entry into the enemy's camp. Bring me news of Rama's plans. If there is any defect in them, let us conquer him by threats. Who are his confidential ministers? Who are his friends? If opportunity offers, we shall alienate them from him. Does he sleep with guards around him or alone? If the latter, we shall fight him at night. How does he spend his time when awake? Is he free from care or beset by it? If the latter, I shall kill him by deceit. Is he about to lay siege to Lanka now or later on? If the latter, we shall deceive him in course of time. Be hidden and somehow gather and bring me full information on all these points. Wise rulers, through good spies, learn everything about the enemies and easily defeat them in battle."

The spies, under the lead of Sardula, circumambulated the ruler of Lanka, bowed low at his feet, and took leave of him. They proceeded joyfully to where Rama and Lakshmana were. When they neared mount Suvela, they disguised themselves and observed minutely Rama, Lakshmana, Sugriva, Vibhishana and others. Fear came upon them more and more and their hearts sank, as they had a closer look at the monkey-army. Meanwhile Vibhishana, the soul of *dharma* found them out, took them to Rama, and said, "Lord, this is Sardula, the head of the spies sent by Ravana." The monkeys cried, "This wicked wretch shall not be allowed to go alive" and they attempted to torture and kill him. Then Rama ordered them to desist and let him go. Then they drove him out with blows and curses and began to torture the other spies, whom also Sri Rama saved from their hands. With their minds dazed and their senses confused they went back to Lanka heaving sighs of pain. Since it was their function to visit other countries in disguise and bring information about them, they came and said to Ravana, 'your Majesty, Rama and Lakshmana, with an immeasurable force, have encamped on mount Suvela."

CHAPTER 30

VANARA ARMY

SOMEWHAT excited, Ravana said to Sardula, "You seem to have been roughly handled by some one. Your face has changed colour! Did you fall into the hands of fierce foes?

Then Sardula managed to reply, trembling with fear and in a weak voice, 'Your Majesty! It is impossible to learn in secret the facts about those monkey-heroes. They are strong and valiant and are under the protection of Rama. Why, we could not gain speech with them; How could we enquire and know their hearts? Monkeys, mountainous in bulk, guard each path most carefully. The moment I made my way into the monkey-forces, which none of our spies could do, they found me out. The ministers of Vibhishana caught us, threw us down and rolled us on the earth. Meanwhile the monkeys, gathered round us, pounded us with their fists and hands, kneaded us with their knees and tore us to pieces with their teeth and nails. Those impetuous monkeys dragged us along everywhere crying, "Here are the spies that have come to discover our secrets. Then drenched in blood, and bereft of our senses, we fainted away. When we regained consciousness, they began to torture us again. At last they took us to Rama. We cried "This is too much for us. Save us from death." At our earnest entreaty, he took pity on us and ordered our release. We owe our life to his compassion and have come to you in this plight. With rocks and mountains, Rama has built a causeway across the sea; and having led his monkey-hosts over it, he stands at the gates of Lanka armed to the teeth. He has arrayed his army in the form of Garuda, and having sent me away, he is marching towards Lanka blazing in his lustre. Take Sita back to him before he enters the city; or else be prepared to fight him."

Ravana thought a little and said, *"Devas, gandharvas, danavas,* and the rest may band themselves against me, all created beings may try to frighten me, yet Sita shall not go back. I will fight the enemy as you said. So give me all the information that I ought to know and that you have been able to collect. Who are the renowned warriors, in the monkey-army? What forms do they take? Who are irresistible on the battle-field? Whose grandsons speak the truth? Let me know their strength and weakness and take appropriate steps. We must have an idea of the numbers, the strength and weakness of those that would fight with us.

Then Sardula ventured to reply, 'Your Majesty! Sugriva, the king of the monkeys, is the son of Riksharajas. He is unconquerable in battle. Gadgada had two sons, Dhumra and Jambavan by name. Jambavan emerged from the mouth of Brahma, as he yawned. He was brought up later on by Gadgada. Kesari was begotten by Brihaspati. His son Hanuman, slew Aksha and other *rakshasa* heroes. Sushena is the son of god, Dharma. (It is said in the *Balakánda,* that the god Varuna begot Sushena. But Sardula might have mixed up things in his terror). Dadhimukha is the son of Soma. Sumukha, Durmukha and Vegadarsi might verily be called death walking in the shape of monkeys. Brahma created them for this very purpose. Nila, the Generalissimo, was begotten by the god Agni. Hanuman is the son of the god Vayu, while Angada is the grandson of Indra and equal to him in youthful strength and pride. Mainda and Dvivida were begotten by the twin gods Asvins. Gavaksha, Gavaya, Sarabha, Gandhamadana were begotten by the god Yama and are equal to him in all respects. There are ten crores of monkey-heroes of matchless radiance, all begotten by the gods. And no one can say what the origin or abode of the others may be. The mighty Being that protects them all is the son of Dasaratha. Handsome in every limb like a lordly lion, he is in the prime of youth. He is the slayer of Khara, Dushana, Trisiras, Maricha, Subahu and Tataka. In all the worlds there is none like in valour and prowess. Has he not killed Viradha and Kabandha who were themselves like the god of death? None can describe the excellences and perfections of Rama. Of all the *rakshasas* who opposed him at Janasthana, does one survive? His brother Lakshmana is the soul of righteousness and like unto a lordly elephant in rut the very ruler of the gods cannot escape with his life once he becomes the mark of Lakshmana's arrow. Sveta and Jyotirmukha, are the sons of Surya. Hemakuta is the son born to Varuna. Nala that redoubtable hero is the son of Visvakarman. Durdhara, the valiant monkey is the son of the Vasu gods. Your brother Vibhishana has received from Rama this kingdom of Lanka and works and prays for Rama's welfare. Thus far, have I reported the facts that I gathered during my visit, what is expedient now it is for you to decide and do.

CHAPTER 31

RAVANA THROWS AN ILLUSION OVER SITA

WHEN the spies told Ravana of the monkey-hosts, unapproachable to foes, and Rama encamped on mount Suvela, the ruler of Lanka was a little upset thereby and said to the ministers standing by him, "*Rakshasas,* now is the time for us to take counsel together. Fetch here all my ministers, who are experts in the science of polity." Soon they came there accordingly and he took counsel with them at great length about the steps to be taken. Then he gave them leave to depart and himself retired into his palace.

There he sent for the *rakshasa* Vidyujjihva (lightning-tongue), "Friend, you are the master of illusion. There is nothing of magic that you do not know; you are strong, courageous and valiant. Let us throw an illusion over Sita. Fashion by your art a likeness of the head of Rama and of Kodanda, his bow." The *rakshasa* said humbly 'Your orders shall be obeyed'. Ravana was pleased and rewarded him amply with coin and ornaments. Then, moved by a strong desire to behold Sita once more, the mighty king went to the Asoka grove and found Sita bowed down with grief, still seated on the bare earth. Ill-fitted to endure suffering, she sat there helpless in the midst of terrible *rakshasis,* and meditating all the time on her Lord. Ravana drew near her and, as if he brought her some joyful news, he cried audaciously, "Sita, despite my best efforts to win you over, you trusted Rama for help and you put me to shame with cruel words, did you not? That warrior, who by a stroke of luck killed my generals Khara and Dushana, he himself has been slain in battle by my troops. The thing upon which you depended for support has now been uprooted. I have brought your pride to the dust, have I not? This calamity will of itself bring you to me as my wife without any word of request from me. Cast away from you this foolish obstinacy. Rama is dead. What use can he be to you now? You shall be the queen and mistress of all my wives. Oh! you have gathered little merit in the past! You have gone without wealth and the pleasures of love, the supreme ends of life. Fool that you are, you are proud of your fancied wisdom. Let me tell you how Rama met his death, even as Vritra, the *asura,* met his death at the hands of Indra.

Intending to kill me, he had come to the northern shores of the ocean and was encamped there with the army of Sugriva. At the night, when they were deep asleep, after their long and weary travel, my spies visited the camp secretly and discovered every detail that I wanted. My *rakshasa* — forces led by Prahasta, has annihilated from the face of the earth the army of Rama and Lakshmana with broad swords, iron wheels, clubs, bolts, sticks, loaded with molton metals, with cudgels and pestles and other weapons, my *rakshasas* worked havoc among the monkeys. Then Prahasta, the terror of his foes came upon Rama where he lay sound asleep and deftly cut off with his sword the head of your husband. Vibhishana was caught as he was trying to escape. Lakshmana and the monkey-troops have been scattered to the various quarters of the earth. Sugriva lies there with his neck broken, Hanuman with his jaw shattered, Jambavan, with his legs cut off, is stretched on the ground like a tree uprooted. Mainda and Dvivida are swimming in a pool of blood, heaving deep sighs and dismal groans. They are severely cut at the loins and can hardly survive. Panasa lies on the ground, pierced like a jack fruit by my *rakshasas.* Dadhimukha too lies there, cloven to pieces by many *narachas.* Kumuda of mighty lustre lies silenced by arrows. Like the cloud-banks being shattered by a storm, some monkeys were trampled to death by elephants and chariots. Some were caught as they fled; some ran here and there in terror; some were hit from behind and taken prisoners. Like a herd of elephants chased by mighty lions, the monkey-army was thrown into confusion in a moment. Some fell into the sea; some sprang into the sky; bears clambered up the trees like monkeys and so escaped. The monkeys could not make out friends from foes in the darkness of the night and so they fought one another to death on mountains and sea-shore and in the woods. Thus your husband and his army have been utterly destroyed by my forces. And now you shall see the head of Rama, covered with dust and blood." He called a *rakshasi* and said to her, loud enough for Sita to hear, "Fetch Vidyujjihva. He has brought the head of Rama from the field of battle."

Forthwith Vidyujjihva brought the head and bow of Rama, bowed before his lord and stood there awaiting orders. Then Ravana said to him, "Place in front of Sita the head of her husband. Let her see with her own eyes and know that Rama is dead. Then that *rakshasa* placed before her the lovely head of Sri Rama. Ravana took the bow of Rama from the hands of Vidyujjihva and said to Sita, 'Lo! the bow of your husband. Prahasta my General slew him at midnight and brought this to me." He pointed to the head and the bow and cried to Sita, "Now at least will you yield to me and do my will?" (The geneology of the monkeys given in this chapter differs from that given in the *Balakanda*. Chapters 31, 32 and 33 are held by some to be not Valmiki's since the story runs smooth without them).

CHAPTER 32

THE LAMENT OF SITA

JANAKI gazed on the head and the noble bow. She called to mind the alliance established between Rama and Sugriva of which Hanuman had told her. The eyes, the complexion of the face, the hair, the forehead, the crest-jewel, all of them, she saw, were Rama's. She concluded that it was the head of Rama and that Rama was now dead. Like a Krauncha bird that had lost her mate, she gave way to her grief and cried aloud, "Mother Kaikeyi! Are you happy now at last? Have your wishes been fulfilled? You have cut off the root of the Ikshvaku race, have you not, you who delight in sowing discord. When you banished to the woods Ramachandra, the brightest jewel of the Ikshvaku line, your intention was that he should not return to Ayodhya to claim the kingdom; but should perish in some misadventure. Raghunatha is dead. Rama, who was the living root of the Ikshvaku tree, is now no more. Lakshmana, Bharata and Satrughna, whose lives are planted in Rama, will give up their bodies. And all this sin you did for the sake of Bharata, your son, did you not? And if he dies, what becomes of your plans? What have you gained? Nothing but mischief. What harm did Rama do to you, Rama who crowned with magnanimity? You have earned for yourself the heinous sin of driving Rama and me into the forest, clad in the bark of trees." Like an uprooted plantain tree she fell upon the earth and fainted. When she came back to herself, tears blinded her eyes; she laid the head of Rama on her lap, kissed it and cried, "Alas, I am lost." Noble one! Is it thus you have fulfilled your vow not to return to Ayodhya without destroying the foe? What sin have I committed that I should see you dead? I am branded with the name of a widow. Some say that the sin of the wife kills her husband, but you were ever virtuous in conduct, and I too have tried my best to be a true and loyal wife. How then is it right that you should die before me? First, I was driven to the forest from the kingdom; then Ravana carried me away. While mounting misfortunes came thick upon me, this terrible fate has overtaken you who took pity on me, and tried to save me. Now I sink into an unfavourable ocean of grief. I have no hope of coming out or reaching the shore again.

Why, this sorrow is not mine alone. The lady Kausalya, so innocent, so good, why should she suffer this misfortune? She would cry like a cow parted from her calf. She has no other son but you. The best of *brahmanas,* reading your stars fore-told a long life for you. Their words have proved false. Or did they give this assurance seeing only your mighty strength and valour? If they knew and studied the books, and spoken the truth, they should have predicted for you this early death, should they not? And yet they could never speak an untruth?.

"Well, could it be that their fortune was changing for the worse and this confused their intellects? Or it may be that the Supreme Being, in whom all creatures have their origin, manifests himself as time brings about the results of action. But he may have cast a veil of confusion over the intellects of the seers, who know the past, present and future as one eternal vow, and made them read your wrong. (This is an indirect hint that the intellect of Sita was confused). You are an expert in polity; you are a master of the art of war, you know the shape of every peril and the way of meeting it. Then, how did you come to be killed unawares in sleep? Did the cruel woman, the Night of dissolution clasp you tight in her arms and carry you away? Yes, charmed by the loveliness of your lotus eyes, she has carried you away? Ghastly sins I must have committed to be thus widowed in my youth. And you met an untimely death because you chanced to marry this most sinful wretch.

It ill - becomes you, the noblest of men, to behave like a mean-natured husband. Here am I, suffering unspeakable agony; my sorrow melts the hearts of all that behold me. Forsaking me in this condition, you fall in love with the woman Earth and clasp her in your arms. I ask you, is it fair and just, is it *dharma?* Alas that I should live to see this mighty bow, decked curiously with gold and gems, lovingly worshipped by both of us with rare perfumes and garlands, now lying masterless, like me, in the hands of enemies! You lack nothing. My dear father-in-law, your father, the great king Dasaratha, and all your noble ancestors, you see them all in heaven and enjoy their company. Yes, you are a star in the firmament. But this Ikshvaku line in which the most meritorious souls desire to be born, this line you have now left without a lord. Lord, will you not open your eyes once and look at me? I cry and sob like this and yet you will not utter a word of solace to me. I am but a girl; I am not old. What do I know of the pleasure of this world? I became your wife when I was very young. And do I not deserve your protection at all times? Have I not shared your joys and sorrows? Have I left your side any more than your shadow? Have I not followed your foot-steps most faithfully on the path of virtue. And what greater calamity could befall me than this? When you clasped my hand in marriage, you said that you would never part from me till breath was in this body. How could you forget the promise you so solemnly made? Wherever you go, take me with you. While I am here longing for you and sorely stricken by grief, how is it just to leave me behind and go all by yourself to the worlds on high and revel in joy? I used to adorn your lovely body with auspicious articles, rare perfumes and bright jewels. I would allow no one else to do this service and I feasted my eyes with the bliss of it. Now it has come to this that dogs, vultures and eagles make a feast on that lovely body.

To go back to Ayodhya after the term of exile, to perform with pomp and splendour many *yagas* like *agnishtoma;* to offer worship to the gods; to have your funeral pyre kindled by fire sanctified by use in all these vedic rights — this would have been right and proper. But why die this unworthy death and pass out without a single religious rite performed over you? Did you die in the battlefield at the hands of your enemies and after having destroyed many of them? Why where you denied the end that awaits every *kshatriya*-hero? (We learn from this that Rama had not performed any *yaga* or *yajna* before this). We came to the forest, the three of us, and now you have gone away from me and in a moment I shall join you where you are. If Lakshmana alone returns to Ayodhya what reply would he give to the lady Kausalya that eats out her heart in sorrow after sending you to the pathless woods? He should tell her that your enemies fell upon you, when you and your armies where fast asleep, and slew you. And the lady Kausalya would die of a broken heart when he hears of your violent death and my being a prisoner in the hands of the *rakshasas*. You went to un-heard-of trouble, all on account of my wicked and sinful self. You crossed the fearful waste of waters for my sake. You slew as if in play Khara, Dushana, Trisiras, Viradha, Kabandha, Vali, Maricha, Subahu, and Tataka. And yet you, who did all this you were killed by pitiful wretch Prahasta. How wonderful. Nay, it is as if one who crossed the mighty ocean were to drown to death in the puddle crossed by a cow's hoof.

I am a sinful wretch who has come to defile the house I was born in and the house I married into. And Raghava took me to wife without knowing this. Was it ordained by fate that I, the beloved wife of Rama, should prove his death? Did I, in some past birth, prevent the gift of a girl in marriage? Why should I, having the saviour of the worlds for my husband, suffer the fate of a helpless destitute? Ravana, slay me too and cast my body on that of Rama. You will earn the high merit of joining wife and husband. Put my head by his head, my body by his body and I will share the noble destiny of my great-souled master."

Thus did Janaki wail out of a grief-laden heart, looking again and again at the head and bow of Rama, like an ordinary woman.

(One may wonder how Sita continued to live, even after she heard of her husband's death. Rama and Sita were the eternal father and mother. Neither Rama nor Sita can cease to live).

Then there rushed into the presence of Ravana a warden of the gate. "Victory, ever Victory to thee" he said with hands clasped over his heads. "Prahasta the general is at the gate, and Majesty! He and all the ministers are here. They pray for an audience. I must be excused for troubling you at this inopportune moment. You have given them leave to conduct the affairs of state at their discretion. Yet his respect for you demands that he should place the facts before you and take your orders. Endowed with all auspicious excellences, it behoves you to grant them an interview. Something serious seems to have happened."

Ravana came out of the *asoka* grove, listened to an account of the valour and warlike arrangements of Rama and took his way to the council hall. Thereafter taking the advice of his ministers, he decided on the arrangements to be made. No sooner did he leave the place than the false head and bow of Rama vanished from sight.

Then the lord of Lanka addressed the generals standing about him who had his welfare in heart, "Order that all our forces are brought here. Call them up with beat of drums. Give no reasons." If the reasons were made public, it might reach Sita too and she might discover that his claims to have killed Rama and the armies were false. The generals gathered their troops and came back to Ravana with the news. "Your majesty, all your forces are here as you ordered."

(It does not become the character of Sita to speak of Kaikeyi as she did. In the presence of Sita, Rama has rebuked Lakshmana for blaming Kaikeyi. Further, she knew the real reason why Dasaratha granted the boons to Kaikeyi; she was present during the talk between Rama and Bharata. Dasaratha was to blame; then why make Kaikeyi the scape goat? We can only explain that Sita behaved as most women in the world behave on such occasions. Like Rama, she too has taken mortal shape and was descended. As Mahalakshmi there was nothing for her to know).

CHAPTER 33

SARAMA CONSOLES SITA

THUS misled by the illusion cast upon her by Ravana, Sita lamented over Sri Rama. Then her dear friend Sarama, the wife of Vibhishana, came over and consoled Sita with soft and sweet words. She was placed there by Ravana to keep watch over Sita and look after her comforts. She was by nature merciful; and so she moved with Sita on friendly terms and loved her dearly. Firm of mind she was constant in friendship. She saw Sita distracted in mind and writhing like a mare, in the dust. She ran forward, raised her gently, wiped away the tears from her eyes and said "My child Janaki, do not mind. I overheard everything that Ravana said to you and also your lament. My heart melted with pity, for I love you dearly. Lying hidden in the hollow of a tree, heard everything that passed between you and Ravana. I am not in the least afraid of Ravana; I count my life as but a straw, where your interests are concerned. This is no wonder. Who can see the beauty of your eyes and remain unenchanted? How can I to stand by and witness your grief?

I went out to know the reason why Ravana left this place in such a hurry. Even without inquiry, it was clear to me that every word he said to you was false. Is it possible for any one to slay Rama awake or asleep? Let that be. Is it possible to deceive an all-knowing seer? Further, can Rama, the Supreme person, ever meet with such a death? And the monkeys, are they ordinary folk? Besides, Raghava protects them, even as Indra protects the gods. And their foes, can they even stand to windward of them.

Again, think for a while on the manly excellence of Rama. Could such a fate befall him? He is gifted with long and powerful arms. His splendour is immeasurable. His limbs are fashioned most auspiciously; his chest is broad and strong; the bow in his hands, Kodanda, is a formidable weapon; he is the embodiment of *dharma;* his fame is imcomparable; his prowess is unequalled. With Lakshmana he watches over those that belong to him and the enemies that have surrendered to him, even as the eyelids guard the eyes. In the science and art of government, he is a past master; he is a veteran in all warlike affairs. Skilful and of infinite resource, he destroys his foes as if in play. His strength and manliness are beyond thought. He is the terror of the race of his enemies. In him the Goddess of victory has her home. And to such a one, this untimely and unnatural death can never come. Ravana is an adept in the arts of illusion. Cruel by nature, he is the foe of all created beings. He practised this deceit upon you, simply because his heart is drawn towards mean and unworthy deeds.

You have come to the end of your sorrows. All happiness will be yours hereafter. Wealth, joy and victory are waiting to join you. I shall tell you something to increase your joy. Listen, Rama has crossed the ocean with his monkey-forces and along with Lakshmana is now encamped along the southern shore of the ocean; he is surrounded by myriads of valiant monkeys. All his plans have succeeded; I speak from direct knowledge. The spies sent by Ravana have brought news that Rama and Lakshmana and the monkey-forces are here. And he is taking counsel with all his ministers as to what to do.

Then there fell upon their ears the terrible noice like that of lions roaring caused by *rakshasa*-forces starting towards the battle-field. The huge war drums beaten by big rods of gold, reverberated like black cloud-banks. Then, Sarama said to Sita "Child this dreadful beat of the war drums tells us that the *rakshasa*-forces are getting ready for battle. Elephants in rut are covered with ornaments and howdahs. Noble steeds are being yoked to the chariots. Countless cavalrymen riding on horses of noble breed rejoice at the thought of approaching battle. Foot-soldiers fully armed, assemble in companies. Like swift rivers flowing into the ocean, the chariots, elephants, horses and foot-soldiers, all curiously decked gather together and move along the high roads. The many-coloured splendour of weapons, shields and armour carried by the four divisions of the army spine like the flame of a forest-fire in summer. The hollow sounds of the elephants' bells, the clash of chariot-wheels, the neighing horses — fall upon our ears like the music of many instruments. The preparation for war of *rakshasa*-heroes that follow the ruler of Lanka is a grand sight that makes the beholders' hair stand on end.

The goddess of victory, who ends all grief is now waiting upon you. The time has come for the destruction of the *rakshasas*. The goddess of victory never leaves the side of even an ordinary man, if the corner of his eye is red. And she abides for ever with Sri Rama who is lotus-eyed. His prowess is unimaginable. He has not seen Ravana before him on the battle-field; hence, he keeps back his wrath. As the *asuras* fared at the hands of Indra, so will Ravana and his *rakshasa*-troops fare at the hands of Rama; and then he will take you with him. As in the far past, Mahavishnu and Indra destroyed the *daityas,* your lord and Lakshmana use against the *rakshasas* their strength and valour. All your enemies fallen, all your wishes fulfilled, you will sit on the lap of Rama.

My eyes will behold your happy face, you jewel of wifely virtue and purity : they will behold the happy face of Rama re-united to you after long parting and mighty efforts. And the joy of this sight shall be for all that I now do for your sake. Soon I shall see you with your husband; you will embrace him and shed tears of joy on his broad bosom. He will loosen your hair that has all these months gathered in a single plait, unadorned and covered with dust. Beholding his noble face, like unto the full moon at its rising, you will wash away your grief and tears as a noble serpent casts off its slough. Annihilating Ravana, Rama will soon fulfil all the wishes of his friends. Formed to enjoy everything that life can offer, the son of Dasaratha will enjoy with you all happiness. Even as the earth filled with standing crops rejoices when the showers descend, you will soon join Rama, the great soul; and will rejoice to behold his prowess. Offer your salutations to Surya who like a noble steed runs in thirty *muhurtas,* his course round Meru, the mountain of gold. Grief and trouble will fall away from you. He is the dispenser of light and life to all living beings. Is he not their only source?

CHAPTER 34

SARAMA FINDS THE INTENTION OF RAVANA

EVEN as the clouds in the sky gladden the earth with welcome showers, Sarama by her soft and gentle speech, consoled Sita whose mind had been confused by the words of Ravana. Then she thought of doing something more to comfort Sita. Being very intelligent, she waited for a good occasion and said with a smile, "Lady, it is easy for me to go unseen from here to Rama, give him good news of you and come back safe. When I course freely, through the sky I defy Garuda, or Vayu to follow me. Have I your leave to go?"

Sita, her voice no longer faint with sorrow — but in accent glad and sweet, prevented Sarama. It might harm the friendship existing between them if she objected to the voluntary offer of help by the *rakshasa*-lady when she said, "I shall go and give news of you to Rama". Sita knew that the only proper thing was for Rama to slay Ravana and the *rakshasas* in battle and take her back in the presence of all. So it was not proper for her to send news of herself meanwhile. (Rama knew well enough how miserable she was in Lanka; he would bend all his energies to deliver her from her prison. Thus, there was no need for her to send him news). Therefore she stopped Sarama skilfully from her purpose by giving her another reason. "Lady, I know full well that you can course freely through the sky and the underworld and elsewhere. I also know full well that you are capable of giving me such a help, as none else can even dream. But, if you would do to please me, go and bring me news of what Ravana is doing now. He is mighty in the arts of illusion; cruel and malignant by nature, he takes delight in wringing the hearts of his foes. Wicked beyond compare, he causes confusion in my mind even as the drug *Varuni.* The *rakshasis* that are placed round me by his orders touch their nose-tips with their fingers, roll their eyes about and glare at me, grin horribly, and frighten me with other monstrous contortions. They cry to me, "He will kill you. He will eat you. He will burn you'' I tremble at the sight of him. I am filled with grave doubts because he has placed me here all alone in the *asoka* grove. It will be a great help if you can bring me news of his doings and of his real intent.''

Hearing this, Sarama of sweet speech wiped the tears of Sita and said, ''Child! if you would have it so, I shall be back in no time with the news of the secret intent of Ravana.'' She went accordingly to where Ravana was, overheard his talk with his ministers and the final decisions reached and came back to the *asoka* grove; There she found Sita like Lakshmi deprived of her lotus-throne with grief and anxiety. Sita clasped Sarama fondly to her heart, gave her a seat and said, ''Lady! be seated comfortably and tell the truth about the plans and decisions of that cruel *rakshasa*.'' Then fearing that Sarama had brought some terrible news, she sat shivering.

''Then Sarama said to her ''Child Janaki! Kaikasi, the mother of Ravana, and Aviddha his old and venerable minister, counselled him many times to take you back to Rama. They said 'Render unto him due reverence and respect and take Sita and give her back to him. The very fact that in Janasthana, in the space of one *muhurta,* Khara and Dushana and their countless followers were slain by him as if in play is quite enough to show what is in store for the *rakshasas*. Leave alone Rama. A monkey, a puny messenger of his crossed the sea, entered your capital, passed unknown to any through your guards and had speech in secret with Sita. He made short work of our *rakshasa*-warriors and brought disgrace upon us all. Which man can do such things? He is by himself quite enough to destroy all the *rakshasas*. Is he not? And Rama who caused all these things to be done through a servant of his, can he be called a mere man? They tried in various ways to turn him from his purpose and they failed. Like an avaricious man who would sooner part with his life than his wealth he would never agree to restore you back to Rama. He who has come to this final decision after taking counsel with his ministers, cannot be turned from his purpose as long as there is breath in his body. The thread of his life is about to snap; death has laid his hands upon him; that is why he is resolved on his course. It is not fear that will make him restore you to Rama, but only the death in battle of himself and all his *rakshasas*. But Rama will despatch Ravana with his sharp arrows and take you back to Ayodhya. Dark-eyed Janaki, all this flows from your boundless grace.

At that moment, as if the voice of heaven confirmed her words, there fell upon their ears the sounds of war drums being struck from the monkey-camps, heightened by the blare of conches that made the earth tremble in affright. The *rakshasas* in Lanka heard it too and grew dispirited, confused and sad as they thought of how they and their kinsfolk stood to loose their happiness, wealth, fame and lives for the sin of their king.

CHAPTER 35

MALYAVAN COUNSELS RAVANA

RAGHUVIRA, the terror of his foes, marched to battle to the sound of war drums, conches, and other warlike instruments. Hearing this noise, Ravana the king of the *rakshasas*, thought deeply for a *muhurta* as to what he should do. Then he looked intently at the ministers around him, roared in anger till the hall of audience shook to its foundations and hurled insults at them. The mighty king of all the *rakshasas*, cruel by nature, he used to make all cry in terror. Thus it was only natural that he should speak thus; "Dust, and chaff of the *rakshasa*-clan! I have heard your descriptions of the crossing of the sea by Rama and his besieging Lanka with his huge army; I have listened to your praises of his prowess and valour. I know also that you are veterans in war and that your valour never goes to waste. The accounts you have heard of Rama's heroism have depressed you and you gaze at one another helplessly, and disspiritedly."

Then Malyavan, the grandfather of Ravana, being supremely wise, decided within himself "Rama is endowed with boundless strength; it is good that Ravana should make friends with him". He addressed his grandson and said "Child! the king who has mastered the four sciences of *Anvikshiki, Trayi, Varta* and *Dandaniti* and puts in practice the rules laid down therein, he alone lives long, rules over all the earth and brings his foes under his sway. (Sumali, Mali and Malyavan were three brothers. Kaikasi the mother of Ravana was the daughter of Sumali. Hence Malyavan stands as grandfather to Ravana).

(The science of self-knowledge is *Anvikshiki.* The *Trayi* explains the secrets of *dharma and adharma. Varta* tells us about what are the right ends of life and what are not. *Dandaniti* treats of the science of government. These four sciences are the sure means to one's realising all one's wishes and preserving what one has acquired. No trouble befalls the king who is a master of these sciences - KAMANDAKINITI)

A king should know when his strength wanes, and then he must seek the alliance of his foes. But when his strength waxes, he must fight his foes. Thus he can attain to undisputed and boundless power and bring all good to those that depend on him. If his foe is equal or superior to him in strength, then the best thing to do is to make peace. The enemy who is less mighty than oneself should not be disregarded, but should be defeated in battle. Now your strength is on the wane; Raghava waxes in strength. It is expedient to make peace with him. But when you seek the alliance of one which is stronger, it is proper to offer him a tribute. And to Rama the most fitting tribute you could offer is that Sita who is the cause of estrangement between him and you.

The *rishis* in heavenly world, the *gandharvas* and all others pray for Rama's victory. So his strength waxes more and more. Let him no longer be your foe. Make friends with him. Brahma, the omniscient, created in the beginning the *devas* and the *asuras* and ordained that the *devas* should hold to *dharma,* and *asuras* and the *rakshasas* to *adharma*. The highsouled *devas* being thus naturally inclined to *dharma*, they stand by Rama, the embodiment of *dharma*, and pray for his success. During the *kritayuga, dharma* prevails over *adharma.* It is only during the *kaliyuga* that *adharma* prevails over *dharma.* During your tour of world-conquest, you carried off by force the women of others; you violated *dharma* and adopted *adharma. Dharma* the god of *kritayuga,* abides with Rama;

Adharma, the god of the *kaliyuga,* abides with you. The *krita-yuga,* god is more powerful than *kali;* Raghunatha is more powerful than you. If the sin that a man has committed exceeds the merit he has laid up, evil befalls him. Because you chose to follow the path of evil, defeat shall be your portion. Because Rama has chosen the path of righteousness, victory shall be his. The *adharma* that you practise increases daily through ignorance and cuts at the root of the *rakshasa*-clan, and adds to the strength and splendour of our enemies, the *devas.* You may say, "How can any sin of mine add to the strength of my enemies?" "But I answer, 'absorbed in the pleasures of the senses and failing to distinguish between right and wrong, you carried away by force the wives of others and thus enraged the hearts of *maharshis,* resplendant like fire. Like tongues of flame, their greatness is irresistible. Their hearts are pure because of their *tapas,* they are ever intent of promoting *dharma'.*

They perform daily in the prescribed manner, the *agnihotra* and other sacrifices; they make offerings in the fire as laid down. Disregarding the *rakshasas,* they chant with loud pitch and correct intonation. Hence the *rakshasas* are scattered in all directions like clouds chased by the strong winds of summer. The smoke arising from the sacrificial fires, fed by the *maharshis* of fierce radiance spreads in all directions and robs the *rakshasas* of their splendour. The strict austerities performed by the *rishis* in holy places, their steadfast penances and observance, sap the *rakshasas'* energy. Brahma granted you the boon of immunity from gods, *danavas, yakshas* and *gandharvas.* But those not included in this category, men, monkeys, bears and ape, have found their way to your capital and roar frightfully in strength and pride.

Further observing the evil omens and portents one can conclude that the time has come for the destruction of the *rakshasa*-race. Mules wail frightfully, clouds of fearful shapes shower hot blood all over Lanka. Elephants and horses shed tears. Flags are covered with dust, and have lost their former lustre. Wild beasts, jackals and vultures have entered the city in crowds and with their noises strike terror into the hearts of those that listen. In our dreams are seen dark women grinning and displaying their white teeth; browbeating men, stealing the articles in our houses, and laughing in tones of thunder.

(This is a reference to Puthana and the other elementals of the middle world that haunt places, like Lanka, where wrong prevails over right). The offerings to the gods are eaten by dogs. Mules are born of cows, mice of mangooses, cats of wolves, dogs of pigs and *kinnaras* and men of *rakshasas*. Doves with snow-white bodies and blood-red feet are found within Lanka by pure accident. The parrots and linnets kept in houses, shriek and scream. Crows and beasts gather in crowds all over Lanka and cry most woefully against the sun; and come back again and again as often as they are driven away. A certain figure like the god of death walks through Lanka. His complexion is a mixture of black and yellow. Morning and evening he thrusts his hairless head into every house and stares most frightfully at everything he meets. Looking at these and other evil omens knowing that the time is against us at present, seek counsel and find out how we can secure our welfare. Thus spoke Malyavan in the highest interest of Ravana. But the best and the wisest of his ministers observed the looks and gestures of the ruler of Lanka and guessed that he did not like and would not accept such good advice.

CHAPTER 36

RAVANA SETS GUARDS OVER LANKA

RAVANA, approaching the hour of his destruction, could not stand the well-meant counsel of Malyavan. But seized with a fit of mad fury, he knit his brows frightfully, rolled his eyes all around and cried. The words you utter as most conducive to my good fall unpleasantly upon my ears. They will never do me good. They pierce my ears like sharp arrows. It seems that your heart inclines towards the enemy. It is unworthy of you. Rama is but a man; strength is things unknown to that class of beings. Further he is weak by nature, single and unaided; he depends help on puny monkeys and bears. Driven away from the kingdom by his father, he has made the forest his only home, and this fellow seems to you a hero when none can stand against. I am the lord and master of all the *rakshasas;* the very *devas* tremble at my sight. I am endowed with all the noble excellences of a great warrior; and I am in your eyes weak and puny. It is not expedient for you to speak to me such harsh words. Perhaps you envy me, born as your kith and kin, and pure and pearless as a warrior. Or is your heart partial towards Rama, my enemy? Do you speak thus harshly to me at the very bidding of my foe? How otherwise can one of high intellect and erudition dare to speak to me thus rudely and offensively?

What you say may be true, it may be conducive to my highest interests. Even so is Sita an object to be easily secured. Sita who is like the goddess Lakshmi come down from her lotus throne how shall I bring myself to take her back to Rama simply out of fear that he might harm me? A few days more; and you will see that I destroy Rama and Lakshmana together with them, Sugriva and his army that trusted in their might. Yes, none of them shall leave a trace behind. Indra and his *devas* dare not face me, on the battlefield. And I, am I to be afraid of meeting your Rama in battle? You are old and grey; you are my grandfather; you wish me well. It is painful for me to speak to you thus harshly. You advise me to restore Sita to Rama, simply because you stand in fear of him.

Let that be; any kind of harm may befall me; I may be cut in twain; yet it is not in my nature to bow to another, whether it is Rama or any one infinitely more powerful than he.

You said, 'The present is not favourable to you. You are weak; and so I advise you to befriend your foe''. Never shall I do so. It may be against the science of polity. Still I cannot do it. It is a fault that is born with me. How can a man put away his nature? Can the leaves of the neem tree turn into honey?

Amazement and fear fill your heart when you see the cause-way built by Rama across the sea. It is a matter of chance, a mere coincidence like the crow sitting on a palm tree and the fruit falling therefrom. This is nothing special! Would any one be frightened at this? Rama has crossed this little span of water and has come here with his forces. And this suits me nicely. It saves me the trouble of going in search of all these foes in order to kill them. Massed together they have come where I am, so that I may destroy them easily and all at once. But one of them will go back alive. I swear it."

Malyavan saw that the ruler of Lanka was angry with him; he was ashamed that his well-meant counsel had proved fruitless; he answered not a word. He saluted the king with "Victory, ever victory to thee", and taking leave of Ravana went back to his palace.

Then Ravana took deep counsel with his ministers; he gave careful thought by himself to their advice and took the necessary measures to guard his capital. Prahasta was posted at the eastern gate; Mahaparsva and Mahodara at the southern gate; Indrajit, master of illusions was placed in charge of the western gate; Suka and Sarana were stationed at the northern gate. Ravana stayed in his palace. Virupaksha one of the bravest and best of the *rakshasa*-warriors, was placed in command over the forces at the centre of the city. Having thus staioned guards all round Lanka, he rejoiced to think that there was nothing more left for him to do. This view was entirely consonant to his changed fortunes. Then he gave leave for his ministers and counsellors to depart and with the salute of "Victory, and ever victory to thee", ringing in his ears, he entered into the inner apartments.

CHAPTER 37

RAMA ARRAYS HIS TROOPS

RAMA, Sugriva, Hanuman, Jambavan, Dhumra, Vibhishana, Angada, Lakshmana, Sarabha, Sushena and his kin, Mainda, Dvivida, Gaja, Gavaksha, Kumuda, Anala, Panasa and others entered the region of the enemies and held consultations about the further action they had to take.

"This is the capital of the *rakshasas* impregnable to *asuras, uragas, gandharvas,* and *devas.* Bearinng in mind very carefully the details reported by Hanuman we should take necessary measures to achieve our ends. Ravana, the ruler of the *rakshasas* makes this place his permanent abode".

Then Vibhishana spoke clearly in the presence of all and his words were pregnant with meaning. Anala, Sarabha, Praghasa, and Sampati, my four ministers, went in the form of birds to Lanka, entered the camp of the enemies and have come back with news of the warlike preparations of Ravana. Prahasta guards the eastern gate, Mahodara and Mahaparsva stand at the southern gate, the western gate is in charge of Indrajit; and Ravana, to whom fear is unknown guards the northern gate. Everywhere there are stationed countless *rakshasa*-warriors of wide renown, all armed to the teeth. Virupaksha is at the head of the forces stationed in the centre of the capital. The contingent is most devoted to Ravana and it consists of one thousand elephant warriors, ten thousand chariots, twenty thousand cavalry and a crore of infantry. They enjoy the boundless confidence of Ravana. Every one of these has at his back ten lakhs of followers trained and ready for war. These *rakshasa*-warriors are valiant, strong, cruel and never turn back in battle''. And he asked his ministers to speak upon the subject in more detail. ''Raghuvira! Sixty lakhs of heroes, each like Ravana himself in valour, prowess, splendour, strength and pride, followed him when he marched to battle against his brother Kubera. And the forces that are now mustered against us are larger. My Lord, it is not meet that I should describe at length of the strength of the foe in your presence. I speak not to bring fear to your heart. I speak thus to rouse your indignation. You can annihilate in an instant all the *devas* and *asuras*. I request you to array your monkey-forces four-square even as Ravana has arrayed his; and utterly destroy the *rakshasas*''.

Raghuvira heard this and said, ''Let Nila our generalssimo, encounter Prahasta at the eastern gate, Angada will meet and vanquish Mahodara and Mahaparsva at the southern gate. Maruti, the son of the Lord Vayu, of boundless valour, he alone is worthy to stand upto Indrajit, the master of illusions, at the western gate. I myself with Lakshmana by my side shall meet and destroy Ravana at the northern gate. He is a constant trouble to *daityas, danavas, maharshis* and great souls; mean-minded, he is proud of the rare boons he has secured and he ranges through the world bringing misery to all beings; I shall slay him and enter Lanka. Sugriva, Jambavan, and Vibhishana will stay between myself and Hanuman with countless monkey-troops. In the coming battle only myself, Lakshmana, Vibhishana and his four ministers will wear human shape.

Let the monkeys retain their original shape and fight with the enemies. This shall be the sign that they belong to our army. The *rakshasas* can take any form at will and they might take human shapes. The monkeys too can take any forms they choose. If they assume human shapes, this would cause confusion between the two forces. The followers of Ravana would think it beneath themselves to assume the forms of monkeys. Even if they do we shall kill out of hand any one that fights against us — in the form of a monkey. Except the seven persons mentioned above any one that takes the form of a man and comes against us shall meet with instant death." He took these measures to achieve his ends. And then finding that the summit of Suvela was inaccessible and pleasant withal, he decided to camp there for the night. Sri Rama having thus covered the earth with his forces, applied his mind on the destruction of his enemies and marched towards Lanka glad in the certainty of success.

CHAPTER 38

RAMA CAMPS ON MOUNT SUVELA

NEXT running to Sugriva and Vibhishana who were utterly devoted to him, loved *dharma,* wise in council and did the right actions at the right time and said "Friends, behold the mount Suvela, shining with the various herbs. Tonight, we shall camp here and feast our eyes on its beauty. We shall see from here the city of Lanka where abides that wicked one who carried away my wife and called down death upon himself. When we consider the rules of conduct laid down by the great ones and the traditions and nobility of his race, his conduct is inexplicable. Owing to his mean *rakshasa* nature, he has brought upon himself this dreadful sin that is condemned by all. At the mere mention of his name, I am beside myself with rage. The sin of this wretch has brought ruin and destruction to all the *rakshasas*. One single person commits a sin through the mighty power of Time and this sin brings death and destruction upon his entire clan". So saying he went up mount Suvela with wrath at his heart against Ravana. Lakshmana followed him fully armed and guarding him carefully. Gaja, Gavaksha, Gavaya, Sarabha, Gandhamadana, Panasa, Kumuda, Hara, Rambha, Jambavan, Sushena, Rishabha, Durmukha, Satabali, Mainda, Dvivida, Nila, Angada, Hanuman, Sugriva and his ministers and Vibhishana and others — all followed Rama. These monkey-heroes, swift like Vayu, reached the mountain top quickly and beheld Lanka built on the summit Trikuta and hanging as it were, from the sky. Looking at the city with its beautiful fortress gates and corridors, filled with auspicious crowds of *rakshasas*, they were struck by wonder. The *rakshasa*-warriors that guarded the fortress walls were beyond count and dark of hue; they appeared as if they were another corridor. The monkeys, eager for battle, were filled with enthusiasm and warlike spirit. Catching sight of the *rakshasas*, they roared like wild lions. Meanwhile, twilight came on and the sun descended, the moon lovely in radiance took his place in the sky. Thus Rama spent that night on mount Suvela, waited upon by Vibhishana and guarded by Lakshmana and the monkey-generals.

CHAPTER 39

THE MONKEYS BEHOLD LANKA

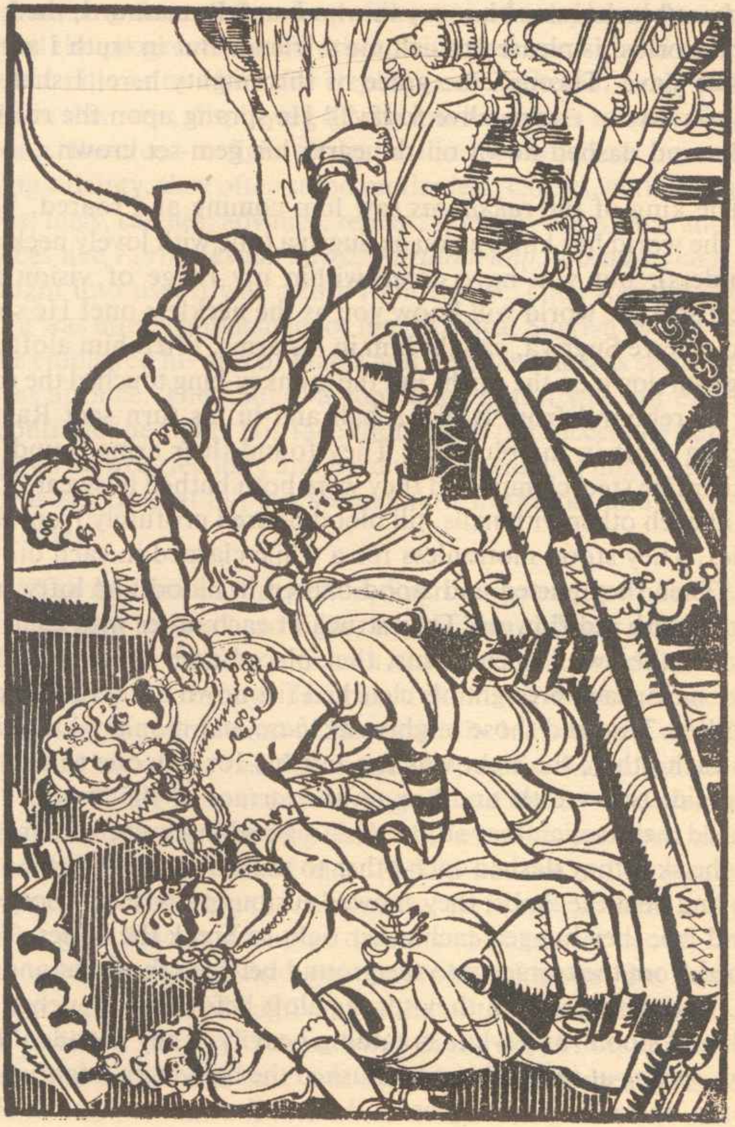
THE next morning, Rama, Lakshmana and the monkeys had a good view of Lanka from the top of mount Suvela. (This took place on the day when they crossed the ocean. What has been described in brief is now given fuller treatment. It was full moon that day and battle began the very next day, the first of the dark fortnight). They were struck with wonder when they saw the groves and gardens, broad, smooth and even and free from wild beasts. *Champaka, asoka, ingudi,* teak, palm, *tamala,* jack, *nipa, saptaparna* and other curious trees abounded there heavy with lovely flowers, fruits, shoots and creeper. The place resembled Nandana, the grove of Indra, or the Chaitraratha of Kubera. All fruits and flowers were found there in every season. Peacocks, cuckoos and other birds cooed sweetly; swan, duck, *chakravaka* and other water fowl, sailed over the lakes, tanks and wells covered with lotus, lily and menuphar. The bees, drunk with honey, filled the groves with their music. The monkeys marched forward, glad and curious feasting their eyes on those wonderful sights. The breeze blew soft and pleasant, wafting the fragrance of fruit and flower. Some warriors got permission from Sugriva to walk towards Lanka; the birds and beasts that beheld them trembled with fear. The capital shook to its very base as they roared like lions, the broad earth quaked at their speed; the dust that they raised hid the sky from view. The bears and lions, boars and elephants, oxen and deer heard them in their forest haunts and fled in fear in all directions. (Suvela, the first of the three peaks of mount Trikuta, has been described so far. The second peak is now described). The middle peak of mount Trikuta was loftier than the other too; it touched the sky and shone like silver, with its trees draped gaily with flowers. It was lovely to behold; one hundred *yojanas* in extent, it was not accessible even to birds. No human being would climb it even in thought. Visvakarma built Lanka, the capital of Ravana, on the top of this resplendant mountain. It was thirty *yojanas* in length and a hundred *yojanas* in extent. Lofty towers like white cloud-banks, walls of gold, and palaces and castles adorned it. The houses shone like clouds that fill the autumn sky. And like Kailasa among the Himalayas, a building stood out among those houses. It was a lofty mansion erected in the centre of the capital, where the four high roads met. Adorned with countless pillars, it shone like an ornament to the city and seemed to touch the sky. Countless *rakshasa*-warriors kept ceaseless watch over it. (The monkeys that went in advance saw Lanka thus. What follows is how Rama himself saw it). Raghuvira and the monkey-warriors saw Lanka, made of artificial mountains covered with various veins of ore and beasts and birds of infinite variety gaily sporting themselves, and filled with wealth of every kind. Their amazement grew apace as they beheld lofty mansions, priceless gems, pearls, coral and other objects of value, skilfully fashioned palaces, guard houses, huge machines, fortress gates and rows of castles. Raghuvira, the master of all wealth and the god of gods, beheld with wonder Lanka endowed with everything auspicious and good. (The monkeys were struck with wonder because they had never beheld till now such wealth and magnificience. But the surprise of Rama was due to another cause. Ravana had won for himself, through the merit laid up in the past, this high status, happiness and power, but he yielded to sin and was about to lose his all. Rama marvelled at the course of *karma).*

CHAPTER 40

WRESTLING BETWEEN RAVANA AND SUGRIVA

THEN Raghunatha went up to crest of Mount Suvela which was two *yojanas* in circumference, stayed there for the space of a *muhurta* with Sugriva and the other generals, and took a good view of the country around. On the middle peak of mount Trikuta, Lanka had been built more skilfully by Visvakarma, the divine architect. Lovely woods compassed it all round. A closer view revealed a lofty tower on top of which sat Ravana, the terror of the worlds, surrounded by his ministers and retinue. A white umbrella, like the full moon, was held over his head by a few *rakshasas.* Others waved over him, from either side, chowries with golden shafts. He was adorned with precious jewels set with gems and covered with ruddy sandal paste; he was clad in silk garments of spotless white curiously worked with gold. On his spacious chest, dark like a surcharged cloud, there shone like reflected moons the scar of the tusks of the elephant Iravata, where it hit him and broke off. (Ravana chose to retain the broken ends on his chest, and planed off the stumps and had them encased in gold and set with gems). His upper garment was red like the blood of a hare; and he himself had the appearance of a scarlet cloud-bank during twilight.

At the sight of him, Sugriva was beside himself with fury, could not brook to see the sinful wretch seated in all the splendour of royalty in the very presence of his Lord Rama. Hence, with mighty strength of mind he sprang into the sky and, alighting on the tower where Ravana sat and faced him straight. He had sworn before Rama, "That wretch of a *rakshasa* has but to come within the range of my eyes and he will be no more. Take it from me as true!" He had been eagerly awaiting the moment when his promise could be fulfilled. He gazed at Ravana intently for a while and without the



least fear, for he regarded him as a wisp of straw, and he bellowed into his ears words which pierced them like keen shafts : "You puny *rakshasa!*black sinner! know you who I am? Ramamurti, the Lord of the worlds, is pleased to call me a friend. But in truth I am his humble slave. Through the grace of this mighty here, I shall see that you do not escape alive today!" He sprang upon the ruler of Lanka and dashed down on the earth his gem-set crown.

The king of the *rakshasas* saw him coming and roared, "Till now the world has known you as Sugriva (one with lovely neck and shoulders); but you have come within my range of vision and henceforth the world will know you as the neckless one! He stood up to receive Sugriva, caught him in his arms, lifted him aloft and flung him down on the earth. But the monkey-king touched the earth only to rebound from it like a ball and in his turn sent Ravana whirling aloft in the blue sky. They found their arms round one another like steel clamps and they were both bathed in sweat. They tore at each other with nails, till blood poured profusely from their bodies. They stood motionless for a while clasped in each other's arm. Then they parted and stood bathed in blood like lofty trees covered with red flowers. They struck at each other with clenched fists and then with open palms; they pieced each other with their finger nails; each brought his clenched fist down upon the head of the other. Thus did those mighty *rakshasa* and monkey-king fight with each other; the sight was too terrible for any one to behold. Long did they wrestle and box on the terrace of the tower. They changed their tactics; they stopped hitting and threw each other aloft into the sky; they dashed each other to the earth; they crushed the neck and bent the limbs; they showed curious patterns of footwork to and fro; they hugged each other tight to break the bones. They slipped from the terrace into the ground between the moat and the wall. Both being skilful, they sprang aloft before they touched the earth and stood for a while breathing heavily. They kneaded their limbs, sprang at each other and crushed the body with mighty arms like the noose of Yama himself. Like a lion and a tiger in their strength, like two elephants in the prime, they tried to lay each other low. Natural strength and trained skill made them display every device, every twist and turn known on earth. Their chests collided and they fell down together. They sprang up, crashed down again, and used all their skill and cunning. They knew no weariness and no weakness, thanks to their military training and strength acquired by practising the art of archery. Like majestic elephants in rut, they barred the progress of each other, with their arms, hard and stout like the pillows to which the elephants are tethered. Long did they fight in this wise, displaying all the known points of wrestling and boxing. Resolved to fight to death, like two wild cats intent upon taking a dainty, they often stood motionless. Circles, curious stances, holds, hugs, catches, advance, retreat, side hits, cross cuts, and other devices like *Parimoksha, Vajra, Paridhavana, Adhidravana,* were brought into use; it was a rare fight to see. Then Ravana decided that it was utterly impossible for him to defeat Sugriva by fair means, so he employed his arts of magic and illusions; he was seen in many places at once. Then Sugriva concluded that it was not expedient to continue the fight. His face shone with the success he had won. Though he wrestled long and hard with Ravana of mighty strength, he was not tired at all, but sprang aloft in the sky and came back to Rama.

When Ravana least expected, Sugriva sprang to where he was, defeated him after a hard fight, eluded him skilfully and returned to his place. The monkey-monarch had forces that could slay Ravana in a moment. Yet through devotion to Rama he would not use them; but without the permission of his master, he himself went and fought with the king of the *rakshasas* and gave to Sri Rama the glory he had won. There were many among the *rakshasas* who were equal to Ravana; but disregarding them all, he set his eye upon the king of Lanka; and vanquished him. He did not use unfair means like Ravana, but observing the rules of war he fought straight and clean and yet gave Ravana a tougher time than he had ever known before. That was what the *rakshasa* got out of the encounter. But boundless good was the mead of Sugriva. A child of the Sun-god he went swift like his father, through the pathway of the sky, brought wonderful deeds and came back safe and victorious. He came and stood, a humble monkey among the other monkeys. He said to himself, "Alas! I have not brought the head of Ravana to lay at the feet of my master. Now shall I stand in his presence"? He came and stood by the side of Rama, as if shame overpowered him. Raghava had vowed that he himself would slay Ravana; and Sugriva had refrained from killing the *rakshasa* simply because he did not want the word of his master to be falsified. It was not as if Sugriva was ignorant of the arts of illusion. He came away without employing them because he knew that Rama would be angry with him if he, like Ravana, used such tricks. Thus, Sugriva, son of Surya after achieving this wonderful feat, came back with the speed of wind to his monkey-hosts with boundless joy in his heart. And boundless too were the joy and warlike enthusiasm of Raghunatha. And the monkey-lords praised their master mightily. (*Chari* is the name given to the movement when the fighter with one foot firmly fixed moves about the other. Moving with both feet is *charana.* A number of these *charanas* taken together is a *kanda* and three or four such make a *mandala.* They may be towards right or left, or both, or partly one and partly the other. *Sthana* is the name given to the movement of the feet, forward, backward and sideways they are of six kinds, *Vaishnava, Samapada, Visakha, Mandala, Pratyali,* and *Alidha (Bharata).* Resting one's weight on the left leg advanced is *Pratilidha;* and *Alidha* is when the right leg is used. *Samapada* is when both feet bear the weight equally. *Visakha* is when there is a span of ground between the feet. *Mandala* is when one stands with the feet placed in a circle — *Dhanurveda).* The stance includes such movements as when one takes a leap or springs like a tiger or a lion. *Gomutra* is the name given, to the movement when one walks, as a cow passing urine while walking. *Parimoksha* is foiling the enemy by changing one's place. To meet and escape similar movements of the enemy is *Pariharana. Paridhavana* is circling round the enemy who stands still. Very quick movements in front of the foe is *Abhidravana. Aplava* is when one takes leaps like a frog. *Vigrahasthana* is when one springs at the enemy without preliminary couching. Marching away from the enemy with one's back turned to him is *Paravrita.* The same movement taken facing the enemy is *Apavrita.* Contracting one's limbs and moving with the idea of taking the enemy captive is *Avadruta.* When one springs upon the enemy with head hung low, intending to strike at him with the feet, it is *Avapluta.* Stretching one's arms to catch hold of the enemy's arms is *Upanyasta.* Suddenly lowering one's arms to foil the enemy's grip is *Apanyasta* (Govindaraja).

Apavrita is movement to the right and the left. Hugging one's arms to the breast so that the enemy might not get hold thereon is known as *Upanyasta*. Shooting one's arms to get a grip of the enemy is *Apanyasta* (Tilaka).

CHAPTER 41

THE SIEGE OF LANKA

RAGHUVIRA noticed on the body of Sugriva the marks of his terrible fight with Ravana. He was glad to see that his friend had come back safe. He clasped him to his breast and said, "Friend, without taking counsel with me, how could you set out on this foolhardy adventure? Kings as a rule depute persons who like to do such jobs, but they do not themselves undertake them. You should not do such things, so long as we are here with. You are fond of such daring feats. But is it right for you to place in a state of ignorance and anxiety myself, Vibhishana and this monkey-army? Pray do not do such things without first consulting us. If you suffer harm, what can I hope for from Sita or Bharata, Lakshmana or Satrughna, or even from my own self? (A cow pours out all her love on the youngest calf, disregarding those born before. Sri Rama disregards Mahalakshmi who is ever with him, but places above her a monkey that joined him only the other day. Is there any limit to the parental love of Raghava? The *Vedas* lay down that the wife is the half of one's self and yet Rama places a devotee higher than his consort, such is the greatness. Brothers and his own body, Sri Rama was prepared to give up for the sake of his *bhaktas*. One sacrifices wife, child and wealth where one's life is at stake. But Rama counts his own life as but a straw in the interests of his devotees). During your absence I came to certain resolutions. Though I know your strength and courage, yet my heart was filled with care because of my great love for you. I resolved to kill in battle Ravana and all his kindred, to instal Vibhishana as the Lord of Lanka and so may make fruitful his surrender to me; to place Bharata in charge of the Kosala Kingdom (else the family tradition would be ruined) and then to quit my hold upon this body." And Sugriva hastened to reply "The moment I set my eyes on that sinful wretch that carried away your beloved wife, I was clean beside myself with rage. I am your slave; this is my duty, no foolhardy adventure."

Raghava applauded the sentiment and said to Lakshmana, "Child, Let us camp on a spot abounding with fruits, roots and cool water and array our forces. Behold the omens that indicate the impending ruin of creatures, monkeys and *rakshasa*-heroes, both will perish. The wind blows fierce; the earth quakes; the mountain peaks stir; huge trees crash down. Clouds form the abode of eagles, vultures and other cruel creatures, and with frightful roar and ghastly shapes shower down blood. This foretells the ruin of beings. The evening sky is fearful to look at, as if smeared with red sandal paste. Blocks of fire fall flaming from the solar orb. Mean beasts and birds look up at the sun and cry with piteous howls; and this strikes terror into the heart of all. The moon shines not at nights; on the other hand, it burns fiercely with hot rays; as happens at the time of dissolution, it is surrounded by rings red at the centre and black at the edges. The circle narrows, an unfailing sign portending dreadful dangers and disasters. Black spots appear on the face of the sun. Constellations shine not as before. The sight of these evil omens makes one think that *yugas* have come to an end and the last day is at hand. Crows, eagles and vultures are worsted by puny birds. Jackals howl dreadfully. Let us, with our armies, enter this very moment into Lanka guarded so carefully by Ravana." He came down from mount Suvela, gazed intently at his forces that no enemy dare approach. Himself and Sugriva put cheer and spirit into the hearts of the monkeys and encouraged them to face the battle with heroic ardour.

Then at an auspicious hour, Raghuvira, bow in hand, led the monkey-forces towards Lanka. Vibhishana, Sugriva, Hanuman, Jambavan, Nala, Dhumra, Nila, Lakshmana and others followed him. The monkey-hosts came behind, like a mighty ocean covering the earth. The *vanara*-heroes, like huge elephants in rut, the death of their foes, carried with them mountain peaks and lofty trees. Thus Rama and Lakshmana, drew near Lanka. It was a splendid sight, with flags and banners. Countless gardens of rare beauty were laid out on all sides. Fortress walls of curious design touched the sky; no enemy dare approach the corridors and gates of the city.

Following the orders of Raghava, the monkeys took up their places and laid siege to Lanka that the very gods dare not approach.

Rama and Lakshmana stood fully armed before the northern gate, lofty as a mountain peak. Even as the lord Varuna guards the ocean, Ravana, kept watch over the place himself. How could any one except Rama stand here and command the situation? Jealously guarded on all sides by dreadful *rakshasas* armed from head to foot, it was full of peril. Like Patala, the nether world, where the *vanaras* have their abode, it struck terror into ordinary creatures. On platforms erected by the side of it, the weapons, armours and flags of the *rakshasa*-warriors were neatly piled.

Nila, the commander-in-chief of the monkey-forces, camped at the eastern gate with Mainda and Dvivida to aid him. Rishaba, Gavaksha, Gaja, and Gavaya helped Angada who besieged the southern gate. Hanuman stood before the western gate, assisted by Prahasa. Sugriva, surrounded by other heroes, ever hissing like the lord Garuda, camped between the north gate in charge of Ravana and Indrajit and the west gate to render necessary help to Rama and Hanuman. Thirty-six crores of renowned warriors stood round Sugriva. Under the orders of Rama, one crore of monkeys were stationed by Lakshmana and Vibhishana at each gate. Sugriva and Jambavan stood to the west of Rama. Endowed with the strength of tigers, these monkeys carried trees and boulders; they took frightful leaps; their nails and teeth were their weapons; with cheerful hearts they awaited the moment of battle. Some had the strength of ten elephants, some of a hundred, some of a thousand, some of an *ogha,* some of a *mahaugha,* while others were of infinite strength. Monkeys, baboons, bears, of various hues, of various features, of various cries, encompassed Lanka. It was a wonderful and curious sight, as if it were an endless swarm of locusts or like a cloud-bank hiding the earth and sky from view. The earth was hid by the monkeys camped there; while the sky was hid by the monkeys that jumped up. Several crores of monkeys laid siege to the fortress of Lanka, while others stood ready for battle. On the slopes of mount Trikuta and all round Lanka, countless monkeys, armed with boulders and trees, barred the way so that not even a whiff of air could enter. Of vast bulk like serried cloud-banks and mighty like Devendra himself, the monkey-heroes surrounded Lanka all on a sudden; the *rakshasas* were filled with wonder. Like the sea that has broken its bounds, the monkey-forces raised a huge roar. Mount Trikuta, with its woods and groves, and the City of Lanka with its houses and fortress walls, shook with the noise. Not even gods and *asuras* and Indra dare oppose that monkey-host protected by Rama, Lakshmana, and Sugriva.

Then Rama arrayed his forces following the principles laid down in the books, took counsel with his ministers about the means of destroying the *rakshasas*, carefully examined the advice of others in his own mind, and came to a conclusion. He was a master of the arts of negotiation, he knew the nature and effects of every policy. Hence he followed the rule that, when one lays siege to the city of a foe, one should send through a messenger the call to battle. With the approval of Vibhishana, he said to Angada :-

"Boy, leap lightly over the courts and make your way into Lanka. Give this message of mine to Ravana, manfully and without fear: 'You, who have lost the grace of Mahalakshmi! You, who have lost your power! You, whose end draws near! You of clouded mind! Proud of the boons you have secured from Brahma, you have troubled and insulted *rishis,* gods, *gandharvas, apsarasas, nagas,, yakshas,* and kings. Out of sheer ignorance you have gathered for yourself a heavy burden of sin. That pride will end today. You carried away my wife by stealth and have incurred my wrath. Destined to punish you for it, I have placed, on my bow, weapons of divine potency and stand here before your fortress gate. If you fight with me and meet death at my hands, you will attain the high worlds where gods and *maharshis* and other great souls go; you will be freed from all your sins. Come, then, quickly to the battle. You deceived me by an illusion with the aid of Maricha; you led me far away from the cottage, and you carried away Sita. Now is the time for you to prove that strength on which you depended when you dared to do that deed. He who steals a piece of gold is not qualified to atone and be purged, unless he restores it. In the same way, restore Sita to me and take refuge with me. I shall forgive you all your sins. Or else, my keen shafts will rid the world of the *rakshasa*-race and leave not a trace behind. (If Ravana should surrender to him Rama meant to give him the kingdom of Kosala that was his by right). 'Vibhishana, the noblest of the *rakshasas* and the very soul of righteousness, has taken refuge with me. And so, enjoying for ever this kingdom of Lanka, untroubled by foes, he shines with unparalleled lustre. He is gifted with all the qualities needed for ruling over the kingdom. But you are utterly unqualified for it; you have stayed far away from the path of right; you are a great sinner; you have no control over your senses; you are surrounded by fools; between this kingdom and yourself, there is a yawning gulf. If you bring Sita back and take refuge in me, I shall give Vibhishana some other kingdom and let you go alive. Else, come out and fight me. If you meet me in fair fight relying upon your strength and valour, you will be delivered from all your sins by my arrows; and you will attain the heroes' heaven reserved for those who never turn back to the enemy and perish in battle. Should you seek to escape from me and taking the form of a bird fly with the speed of thought, to hide yourself in some other world, you can never survive once you have come within the range of my sight. Now, listen, I shall tell you what is for your highest good. I have your life in the hollow of my hand. I can kill you the moment I am so minded. None among the *rakshasa*-race shall survive. You will have no one to perform your funeral rites. Hence, perform them yourself now. Those about to meet their death, long to take a last look at their children, friends, and kinsfolk and other objects dear to them. Even so, take a last look at the Lanka that you have guarded so lovingly.''

Angada took leave of Rama and like the god of fire in human form, coursed swiftly through the sky and alighted on the palace of Ravana. He found him taking counsel with his ministers. He drew near, announced himself and delivered the message of Rama, adding nothing and omitting nothing, while Ravana's ministers sat and listened. ''I have been sent here by Sri Rama, the king of Kosala, who does good to all beings. I am the son of Vali and my name is Angada. All this is no news to you. Raghuvira has ordered me to convey this message to you. 'Oh you of cruel heart, if you call yourself a man, come out of Lanka and meet me in fight. When I see your unwillingness to do so, even after I have laid siege to your capital, it seems to me you are the refuse of creation. I mean to slay you and your ministers, your sons, kith and kin. Let all the worlds breath freely and without fear. Today I shall annihilate you, the eternal foe of *devas, danavas, yakshas, gandharvas, uragas, rakshasas* and *rishis*. (The *rakshasas* are included here because even among them there are good and righteous souls like Akampana, Malyavan, Mandodari, Vibhishana, his ministers, his wife, and his daughter). If you wish to avoid such a fate, bring Janaki back to me and seek refuge with me.' This is the message I have been ordered to deliver to you."

The ruler of the *rakshasas,* hearing these harsh words, was beside himself with wrath and blazed like the god of fire; his eyes were bloodshot and emitted sparks of fire. He cried to his ministers, "Seize this wretch and slay him out of hand." Four *rakshasas,* obeying these orders, fell upon Angada. Angada wanted to show his strength in the midst of the *rakshasas.* So he bore with them for a while, and with two *rakshasas* hanging on each of his arms, he sprang into the air lightly and shook them off from him on his way. And they fell dead senseless at the feet of Ravana himself. Next he smashed to pieces with a mighty kick the lofty tower of Ravana's palace, that was hid by clouds like a huge mountain peak. And the broken part was but a mass of dust even like the peak of the Himalayas struck down by the *vajra* of Indra. Thus he demolished the mansion of Dasamukha, roared out his name and fame like a lordly lion, came back through the sky and took his place among the monkeys close to Sri Rama. At this sight, the *rakshasas* were grief-stricken, while the monkeys rent the sky with shouts of joy. Ravana was filled with boundless wrath when he saw his palace ruined before his very eyes. He heaved deep sighs at the thought that it was a portent of his impending destruction. (Vibhishana had at heart the idea that Ravana should be given the kingdom of Lanka if he would surrender himself to Rama. Rama agreed to it and said 'My kingdom is yours').

Meanwhile Rama, surrounded by his monkey-hosts, began the fight with intent to slay Ravana. Sushena, huge of bulk like a mountain top, had taken permission from Sugriva and accompanied by monkeys that could assume forms at will went round the fortress gates, even like the moon making the round of the zodiacal signs. The bravest among the *rakshasas* were filled with wonder when they saw the countless monkeys encompass Lanka, while the timid trembled in terror. Some were glad at the prospect of a hand to hand fight with valiant monkeys. Some *rakshasas* went mad with fear at the signt of the monkeys massed thick between the walls and the moat, so that there was no room for a needle to enter. And they cried "Ha, Ha". Thus loud war cries increased in the city. The *rakshasa*-heroes wielding arms moved to and fro like the dreadful winds on the day of dissolution.

CHAPTER 42

BATTLE BEGINS

THEN the *rakshasas* went and informed Ravana of the seige of Lanka by the monkey-forces. He was furious and strengthened the measures he had taken to guard the capital. He went up to the top of his palace and looked around : the hills, mountains and woods round Lanka were hidden from view by monkeys, eager for a fight. He was filled with anxiety as to how he could destroy them. He thought over it long and plucking up courage, gazed with wonder at Rama and the monkey-hosts. Meanwhile, Rama approached the walls with his monkeys and saw the joint quarters of Lanka guarded well by *rakshasa*-heroes. As soon as Rama set eyes on Lanka adorned with curious flags and banners, the memory of Sita overpowered him. He said sadly, "Alas! my Janaki whose eyes are like those of a frightened dove, she is too delicate to endure hardship. Here in Lanka, she lies stretched on the ground tortured by ghastly *rakshasis,* consumed by grief. All this was brought about by me and all this she endures for my sake." Because of his infinite compassion, he controlled his swelling wrath and ordered the monkeys to begin the battle.

At this the monkeys vied with one another in roaring like lions. Each said to himself "With mountain peaks and with our fists, hard like diamonds, we shall reduce this Lanka to dust."

Armed with rocks and boulders and uprooted trees, the warriors got ready for battle. Before the very eyes of Ravana and utterly disregarding him, the monkey-army began to cross the fortress walls at many points, as ordered by the chiefs. Observing this, Raghava was glad. Ready to give up their lives for Rama's sake, the monkeys with red faces and golden bodies surrounded Lanka, carrying trees and rocks as weapons. With trees, rocks, and fists, they destroyed walls, groves and gateways. With logs, grass, boulders, trees and earth, they filled the moats which had once held clean, sweat water. The leaders swarmed over the fortress walls, followed by a million monkeys. They pulled down the golden gateways and the towers that looked like the summit of Mount Kailasa. From all the four quarters they entered Lanka, roaring, jumping and going hither and tither. Able to assume what forms they would, they roared like lions, shouting "Long live the mighty Rama and Lakshmana and their ally Sugriva!", laughed uproaringly and marched towards Lanka. Meantime, the monkey-leaders, Virabahu, Subahu, Nala and others, crossed the walls and arrayed their forces in various places. At the eastern gate stood Kumuda with ten crore monkeys. Prahasa and Panasa were stationed there to assist him. At the southern gate stood Satabali with twenty crore monkeys. Sushena, the father of Tara, stood at the western gate with sixty crores of monkeys. Sugriva, the king of the monkeys, stayed with Jambavan, near the northern gate where Rama and Lakshmana were. Gavaksha, the chief, with terrible eyes and mountain-like body stood, with a crore of monkeys to the right of Rama. Dhumra, the king of the bears, terrible in his swiftness, stood to the left of Rama with a crore of monkeys. Vibhishana, peerless in strength and valour, stood, mace in hand, near Rama. Gaja, Gavaksha, Gavaya, Sarabha and Gandhamadana moved from place to place and guarded the army.

Enraged by this sight, Ravana ordered all his forces to start for the battle. The *rakshasas* rejoiced thereat and raised terrible shouts. They beat with golden rods their war-drums white like the moon and blew their conches. With their black bodies adorned with priceless jewels, and with their conches making deafening music, they looked like rain-clouds surrounded by storks and pierced by lightning. As the rivers fall into the ocean at the time of moonrise and on the day of dissolution, the *rakshasa*-forces mingled together shouting and roaring in mad glee. The monkeys roared and shouted in return; so that the mountain Trikuta and its slopes and caves echoed with the din. Conch, kettle-drum, war drum and other instruments of martial music mingled with the trumpeting of elephants, and neigh of horses, the crash and thunder of chariots, and the war cries and shouts of the soldiers, to shake the earth and sky to their foundations.

Meanwhile the battle began between the monkeys and the *rakshasas,* like the fight between the *devas* and the *asuras* in the far past. The *rakshasas* shouted out their names and prowess and achievements, as they struck at the monkeys with clubs, swords, tridents, and hatches. The cries "Victory, to our Majesty!" from the *rakshasas* were answered with cries of "Victory to our Lord Sugriva!" from the monkeys. The *rakshasas* were slain in countless numbers by the monkeys with trees and rocks, with nails and teeth. From the battlements the *rakshasas* struck and stabbed and tore the monkey-forces wtih swords, tridents and sticks. The enraged monkeys sprang at them and pushed them down. Thus a river of blood flowed above the bodies of the dead and dying. The fight between the *rakshasas* and the monkey-forces was unique and incomparable.

CHAPTER 43

CLOSE FIGHT

AS the monkeys and the *rakshasas* fought, mad fury took hold of both sides. With horses of noble breed decked with gold ornaments, banners and flags like lambent flame, chariots like solar orbs and beautiful armour, the *rakshasas* set out for war and the quarters reverberated with their lion-like roaring. Doing terrible deeds, they ever sought the victory for their lord and master, Ravana. The monkey-forces too were determined to defeat them and sprang at the *rakshasas* who could assume what form they would. Meanwhile there began a series of hand to hand fight between the famed warriors on either side. Like the lord Rudra and Yama in the far past, did Angada and Indrajit meet each other on the battle-field. Prajankha, the *rakshasa,* faced Sampati, the minister of Vibhishana, Jambumali and Hanuman; Vibhishana and Mitraghna, Gaja and Tapana, Nila and Nikumbha, Sugriva and Prahasta, Lakshmana and Virupaksha, Sri Rama and Agniketu, Rasmiketu, Suptaghna and Yajnakopa; Samanta, and Vajramushti, Dvivida and Asaniprabha, Nala and Pratapana, Sushena, the son of the god Dharma, and Vidyunmali; and other veterans were pitted against in dreadful fight. Streams of blood flowed through the battle-field, carrying with them the bodies of the monkeys and *rakshasas* like logs of wood and covered with hair like tender grass.

Indrajit hit Angada with his club like the *vajra* of Indra. Angada, in his turn, smashed the splendid chariot, horses, and the drivers of Ravana's son. Prajankha pierced Sampati with three keen shafts; Sampati struck Prajankha dead with a lofty tree. Jambumali from his place in the chariot aimed the weapon Sakti, right at the breast of Hanuman. Maruti ground him and his chariot to dust. Pratapana sprang upon Nala with a frightful roar; but the monkey-lord, cloven as he was with the keen arrows of the *rakshasa,* tore out the eyes of his enemy. Praghasa consumed the monkey-forces as if he sent them down his huge throat; whereat Sugriva felled him down to the earth with a huge tree. Agniketu, Rasmiketu, Suptaghna and Yajnakopa hit Rama with their sharp arrows; while the son of Dasaratha shore off their heads lightly with his flame-like arrows. With a blow of his fist Samanta struck down Vajramushti, his car and horses. Even as the sun pierces a cloud with his rays, Nikumbha pierced the black body of Nila. He followed it up most skilfully by a shower of arrows, clove the limbs of his enemy and roared out in mad glee. But even as Mahavishnu slew of old the *asuras* with his *chakra* (disc), Nila plucked the chariot-wheel of Nikumbha and cut down the head of the driver. Dvivida, with his limbs hard like the *vajra* of Indra or the thunderbolt, hit Asaniprabha with a mountain-top; and the *rakshasa* pierced Dvivida with his arrows hard like thunderbolt. Thereat the monkey mad with wrath, struck down with a huge *sala* tree the *rakshasa* and his car and horses. Vidyunmali, seated in his car, hit Sushena with gold-bound shafts and roared again and again; but the monkey with a huge mountain-top ground to dust his car. Vidyunmali foiled the blow most skilfully and leapt down with his club. Then Sushena sprang upon him with a big boulder. The *rakshasa* hit the foe with his mace. Yet the monkey paid no heed to it, but brought down the boulders upon the head of Vidyunmali, who fell dead upon the earth with a cloven heart.

Even as the *daityas* of old were defeated by the *devas,* the *rakshasa*-heroes were foiled by the monkey-warriors in this hand to hand fight. The battle-field was a frightful sight, with its broken swords, maces, *saktis, tomaras,* broad swords, and crashed cars, dead war-horses, elephants, monkeys and *rakshasas;* cars with their axles, wheels and yokes broken and jackals and vultures feasting joyfully on the corpses. Headless trunks of monkeys and *rakshasas* bobbed up and down along the rivers of blood. In that battle that resembled the fight between the *devas* and the *asuras,* the *rakshasas,* torn by the nails and teeth of the monkeys and with bodies covered with blood, awaited the setting of the sun, to renew the fight. (The *rakshasa* strength waxes during the night and it was the best time to practise magic).

CHAPTER 44

NOCTURNAL BATTLE

THE sun set as the two forces were thus engaged in fight; and night came in that was fatal to the monkeys; *rakshasas* and monkeys with relentless ferocity and equal ardour for victory fought at night more dreadfully than before. Nothing was visible in the darkness; the *rakshasas* and the monkeys slew their own comrades, mistaking them for enemies. "Hold, kill, cut, cut, flee, flee;" such dreadful cries alone were heard. The *rakshasas,* nocturnal wanderers, were themselves confused by the darkness. Their black bodies, set off by flashing ornaments of gold, resembled huge mountains covered with forests put up by rare herbs. In the ghastly darkness, the *rakshasas,* mad with fury tore and ate the monkeys. In their turn, the monkeys sprang upon horses with golden saddles, upon flags flaming like fire, upon elephants, elephant drivers, and chariots, dragged them down in mad fury and tore them with their teeth and nails. Rama and Lakshmana, with arrows like hissing snakes, stuck down the *rakshasas,* whether visible or hidden. The dust raised by the horses and chariot-wheels filled the nose and ears. Thus as the battle raged dreadfully and one's hair stood on end, blood flowed in torrents. Huge drums, kettle drums, conches, flutes and other instruments produced a wonderful harmony. The cries of the wounded were terrible to hear. Monkey-warriors killed by sword, trident and other weapons, and *rakshasas* slain by mountain-tops were the offerings made to the goddess of earth; weapons were the flowers used in this worship. The battle-field had no visible landmarks and was utterly impassable, because it was all covered with blood and flesh. Like the Black Night that swallows up all created beings, this night carried death and destruction to the *rakshasas* and the monkeys (Bhimarathi is the night that brings fear to all beings. Or the name might be interpreted to mean the *saktis* known as Gananayikas — Sati, Kalaratri, and Bhairavi). In that frightful darkness, the *rakshasas* hid Rama from view under showers of arrows. The roaring noise of their onset was like the seven oceans surging up on the day of dissolution. Observing this, Rama sent against them in a moment arrows like flames which pierced their vitals. From these Yamasatru, Mahaparsva, Mahodara, Vajradamshtra, Mahakaya, Suka and Sarama escaped with their lives. Then the arrows of Rama, brilliant with golden bands, made the night like an autumn night lit up with fire-flies. The ghastly night was made ghastly by the roars of *rakshasas* and the neighing of horses. Mount Trikuta seemed to speak through all her caves; such was the increasing noise that rose from all sides. Baboons and langurs, huge and dark of body, crushed the *rakshasas* between their mighty arms and made a feast of them.

Then Angada decided to slay Indrajit and struck at him, his driver and his horses. Then Indrajit was forced to leave the battlefield deprived of his car and his steads. Rama, Lakshmana, the gods and the *rishis* praised Angada mightily. Since the valour and might of Indrajit were well-known, they extolled highly the wonderful feat of Angada in driving this hero from the field. Sugriva, Vibhishana and the monkeys cried, "Excellent, excellent". Indrajit was beside himself with anger at being so foiled.

Then Rama said to the monkeys, "Rest calm and free from fear, all of you with Sugriva. This *rakshasa* troubles the three worlds because of the mighty boons granted to him by Brahma. He will defeat you now since the time is favourable to him. I have to honour the word of Brahma and should put up with this for a while."

Then the wicked *rakshasa,* the unconquered hero, from where he was hid, discharged some arrows hard and sharp like thunderbolts. They fell in the shape of mighty serpents upon Rama and Lakshmana and pierced their limbs.

He made them unconscious through his magic arts and bound them with the *Naga* cords. All the monkeys saw Indrajit in his fury strike down with his serpent weapons and bind and render senseless those lords of humanity. That wicked wretch, unable to defeat them in fair fight during the day, bound these princes through his magic art at night.

CHAPTER 45

RAMA AND LAKSHMANA BOUND BY NAGAPASA

THEN Rama despatched the two mighty sons of Sushena with Nila and Angada, Vinata, Jambavan, Sanuprastha, Rishaba, Rishabhaskanda, and Sarabha, to find out where Indrajit stood. They sprang into the sky in great joy with large uprooted trees as weapons and searched most carefully all round. Indrajit reduced their matchless speed by powerful arrows and displayed his wonderful skill in the art of magic weapons. Their bodies cut with iron nails, they could not see Indrajit, as one could not see the sun hemmed in by dark clouds; those monkey-heroes for all their frightful speed were unable to find out where he was. Then the son of Ravana pierced the bodies of Rama and Lakshmana with showers of arrows and there was not space enough for a pin to enter.

Blood flowed in torrents from the wounds; Rama and Lakshmana shone like lofty trees covered with scarlet flowers. Then Indrajit, black like cloven mountain of collyrium and with bloodred eyes, made himself invisible through his magic arts and said to Rama and Lakshmana, "When I choose to fight rendering myself invisible, the king of the *devas,* Mahendra himself, cannot find me out. Who can approach me? You, puny men, are beneath notice. I will make you a prey to my wrath through my arrows decked with the feathers of vultures and send you straight to the world of Yama." He clove with sharp arrows the princes who never strayed from virtue and roared with delight like a lion. He bent his bow huge like a mountain and from it discharged arrows unceasingly. Knowing as he did the secrets of weapons and the vital spots in the human body, he aimed his keen arrows at those spots and roared again and again. Rama and Lakshmana were fair fighters; hence they would not strike at the enemy, following the sound made by him, according to the rules of Sabdaveda. They were bound and bitten by arrows in the form of serpents; and in a moment their eyes were closed. Like the banners of Indra, which comes down when the strong cords that held it aloft are loosened, the princes fell on the earth, their vital spots pierced with the arrows shot by the son of Ravana. Covered with gushing blood, bound tight with the serpent arrow, tortured by unbearable pain, they lay as it were on a bed of arrows. There was not a little finger's width in their bodies where arrows were not embedded; nor was there a spot from head to foot not bound and pierced by those serpent shafts; nor a limb that was not clamped tight and rendered motionless. The wicked *rakshasa* who could take forms at will tortured them thus; and like streams that rush down mountain slopes, torrents of blood coursed down from their bodies. Indrajit, who once had taken Indra captive in battle, was beside himself with wrath as he struck the princes again and again in their vital spots. Rama was the first to fall down. *Narachas* with golden bands and keen heads, *ardha-narachas, bhallas, anjalikas, vatsadantas, simhadamshtras,* and *kshuras,* were despatched by Indrajit to pierce them again. (Arrows with round heads are *narachas;* the same with a cleft in the middle is an *ardha-naracha.* An arrow with the head of a hatchet is a *bhalla;* a shaft with the head fashioned like clasped hand in appeal is an *anjalika;* while a *vatsadanta* resembles the teeth of a horse; and *simhadamshtra,* the tusks of the lion, and pits point. *Kshura* was like a sharp razor). The redoubtable bow of Rama, inlaid with gold and with three curves, was broken at the grasp; and Sri Rama sank on the earth leaning on the bow, with loosened bowstring. Lakshmana turned and saw his brother lying on the earth, unconscious on the bed of arrows; and he gave him up for lost. Grief overcame him as he cast his eyes on Rama who lay stretched on the earth with his body pierced by the shafts that bound him tight. His eyes, lovely as the petals of a blown red lotus were closed.

And all the monkey writhed with unspeakable sorrow. Hanuman and the other monkey-warriors stood round them, dazed by grief. The sight of the princes bound by the serpent bonds, pierced all over and lying helpless, was too much for them. (Why should Rama and Lakshmana allow themselves to be bound by the serpent-arrows of Indrajit? Sri Rama was the lord of the worlds who had but to move an eyelid to consume to ashes the boundless Universe. It was all because he wanted to do honour to the word of Brahma and abide by it. He himself should not break the law he had laid down for the conduct of the worlds).

There is a text that says "the bodies that the Lord takes on are not formed of the five elements. They are not made up, like other bodies, of flesh, fat and bones. The bodies of Rama and Lakshmana were not like those of mortals. The wounds and the bleeding were only apparent. What does an *avatara* gain by undergoing such limitations and acting like a man? Otherwise people would say, "He is not a man, but a god. How can we follow him in his life? He is far above us and his virtues are not meant for us". But if he lives as a man among other men, his example will lead many on the path trodden by great souls. Again Rama had to honour the boon granted to Ravana by Brahma that the *rakshasa* should meet his death at the hands of none but men. From this incident of the serpent bonds we should learn the lesson that even those that ever walk on the path of *dharma* cannot meet at times difficulties and dangers; but these will soon pass).

CHAPTER 46

RAMA AND LAKSHMANA BOUND BY NAGAPASA — *(Continued)*

THEN, the monkeys saw that Rama, Lakshmana, the earth and the sky were all hid from view by the arrows of Indrajit. After his arrowy shower was over, as when the clouds have spent themselves, Vibhishana came there with Sugriva, Nila, Dvivida, Mainda, Sushena, Kumuda, Angada, Hanuman and the rest were there sunk in grief. Rama and Lakshmana lay motionless, breathing softly; their bodies covered with blood and pierced with sharp shafts. Sighing heavily for a while; still for a while; their limbs moving slightly to and fro hissing like angry serpents, they lay drooping like golden banners. Monkey-warriors stood round them, shedding copious tears. Vibhishana and the warriors were filled with grief, when they beheld their master Sri Rama and his brother lying unconscious on the battle-field. Though they searched all earth and the sky quarters, they could not discover Indrajit who was hidden by his magic arts. Only Vibhishana, who knew the ways of the *rakshasa* saw the son of Ravana. Indrajit, resplendent in prowess and glory beheld with joy Rama and Lakshmana bound by his serpent arrows and lying unconscious on the earth; and he cheered the hearts of his troops : "Behold those who slew Khara, Dushana, Trisiras and the other *rakshasa*-heroes these mighty warriors, lie here struck down by my arrows; the *devas* and *asuras* together cannot release them from these serpent bonds. They on whose account my father spends sleepless nights; they whom the inhabitants of Lanka fear and dread like the rivers in flood during the rains, those very Rama and Lakshmana have been slain by my magic weapons. These vowed to destroy us, root and branch. Like the clouds of autumn, the valour of Rama and Lakshmana and their monkey-forces has been utterly washed." And he pierced the monkey-lords further with keen arrows. Fifty of them hit Nila, Mainda and Dvivida, received three each. Jambavan was left with a single shaft in his chest. Hanuman had ten in his body; Gavaksha, the leader of baboons, Angada and the others had countless arrows all over them. Thus did that mighty hero cleave the monkeys with his flaming shafts; they shook in terror; and the *rakshasa* roared so that the quarters echoed and laughing like thunder, he said, "*Rakshasas,* behold Rama and Lakshmana lying there on the battlefield unconscious and bound by my dreadful arrows. The *rakshasas,* used to foul deceit applauded his wonderful feat and roared like lions or black clouds on all sides. They concluded that the princes were dead, since they lay there without breath or motion and they sang the praises of the son of Ravana.

Then Indrajit was delighted beyond measure and returned to Lanka; the *rakshasa*-forces were beside themselves with joy. Sugriva was filled with dire terror when he beheld the bodies of Rama and Lakshmana riddled with arrows from head to foot with no space for a needle to enter. Looking at the monkey-king, with pale face and tearfilled eyes, and overwhelmed by fear and grief, Vibhishana said, "Sugriva, fear not. Stay your hot tears. Victory cannot be the lot of any one for ever. This is the way of battles. If we had done anything good in our past lives these sons of Dasaratha, will revive; the cloud that hangs over them will clear and they will shine as before in strength and valour. Pluck up courage. Put cheer and spirit into my heart too. I have none to look up to. Those whose hearts are ever turned towards truth and righteousness have no fear of death. He consoled him thus; and to ward off evil and to relieve him of fatigue, the *rakshasa* wiped the eyes of Sugriva with water. He uttered over the water some charms that enabled one to pierce the illusions of the *rakshasas* and sprinkled it over Sugriva's eyes and face. Then he spoke to him apt and timely words so that he might not give way to grief; "This is not the time to grieve. To display too much friendship at the wrong time often leads to death. Hence cast off fear from you; it spoils every good attempt. Think what is good for this monkey-host that depends on Rama? Keep watch over Raghuvira until he comes back to himself. These princes only take a spell of rest; soon they will rise and put an end to all our sorrow. These serpent bonds what are they to Rama? Why should you have the shadow of a doubt that he will meet with death? Does the grace of goddess Lakshmi shine on the face of one whose death is near? And are not the faces of these princes radiant with her grace? Hence you and your forces may rest free from care.

I shall make arrangements for the action that needs to be taken and shall soon return. Till then keep watch here most carefully. Lo, our monkey-heroes whisper to one another about taking to flight, their hair on end with fear. When Indrajit was fighting with us, I ran here and there to put courage into the hearts of our friends; but they took me for Indrajit and quaked with terror. As a man casts away a used and faded garland, let our troops cast fear away from them." He consoled Sugriva and encouraged the monkeys saying, "I am not Indrajit. I am Vibhishana, your best friend and the worst enemy of Ravana. Fear not."

Meanwhile Indrajit, that master of magic, went to Lanka surrounded by his armies, laid his head at the feet of Ravana and spoke with joined palms, "Your Majesty! Rama and Lakshmana are no more." Thereat the Lord of Lanka, beside himself with joy, with a mighty roar sprang from his throne, clasped that best of heroes fondly to his breast, kissed his head and asked him to recount at length how his enemies perished. Then Indrajit described most vividly how he bound Rama and Lakshmana with serpent bonds; how he crashed them down and they lay on the earth, pale and still. The heart of Ravana swelled with joy; he was now relieved of all anxiety and fear about Rama; and he praised highly the valour of his son. (The first day of the fortnight was over by that night).

CHAPTER 47

RAMA AND LAKSHMANA SHOWN TO SITA

THEN the monkey-lords stood round Raghava and kept careful watch over him. Hanuman, Angada, Nila, Sushena, Kumuda, Nala, Gavaksha, Gavaya, Sarabha, Gandhamadana, Jambavan, Rishaba, Kanda, Rambha, Satabali, and others arrayed the forces; they tore up huge trees, looked intently up and down and on all sides; they were startled even by the movement of a blade of grass; such was their dread of the approach of the *rakshasas*.

Meanwhile Ravana gave leave to Indrajit to withdraw and sent for the *rakshasas* that guarded Sita and also for Trijata. He said to them "Let Sita know that Rama and Lakshmana have been slain by Indrajit. Take her in the car Pushpaka and show her these puny warriors lying dead on the battle-field. Relying on the prowess of that husband of hers and his brother she was so haughty, and disdainful to me, was she not?

Both of them are lying dead on the field. Now, she will be free from care and anxiety. With no thought of going back to Rama, she will come to me of her own accord. She has no one else to lean on and will gladly choose me. She will be adorned with garments and jewels to her heart's content." Those *rakshasa* women took her on the car Pushpaka; it was nothing to them that her mind was distracted and dazed with sorrow; they took her to the battle-field to show her Rama and Lakshmana. Ravana adorned his capital with flags and banners and garlands and made proclamation that Rama and Lakshmana had been slain by Indrajit. Sita went with Trijata in the car Pushpaka to the battle-field. She beheld the entire monkey-army struck down; the monkey-lords were sunk in grief as they stood around Rama and Lakshmana. The sons of Dasaratha all unconscious, lay stretched on a bed of arrows. Their armour was broken, their bows slipped away from their hands; and their limbs were riddled with arrows; they looked like two bed rests of arrows. Like Skanda and Visakha, the sons of Agni, those mighty men lay there in that plight, their eyes closed that resembled the petals of the red lotus. The sight was too much for her and she moaned long and grievously. Janaki of matchless beauty and grace wailed aloud as she beheld Rama and Lakshmana stretched in the dust. As the brothers once radiant like unto the very gods, lay there motionless, tears blinded her eyes. She thought that they were no more.

CHAPTER 48

SITA'S LAMENT

"ALAS, experts in the science of body marks and prognostication pretold that I would bear sons and never be a widow. The words of these wise ones have now proved false. (The significant marks on the bodies of men and women are many. Women have sixty-six. She whose bosom is hairless, level and symmetrical, is born to have wealth, love of her husband and a long married life. She whose fingers and hair are long will have length of years and many sons). They said that I would be the queen of an Emperor who performs many sacrifices to the gods; 'now those words are all false, because my husband is no more. You are thrice fortunate; you will be the wife of a king, a hero of heroes'. How can these words come true when my lord Raghuvira has lost his life? 'Lady, all things auspicious are yours for ever.' This blessing of the good and the great has gone along with my Raghava (A lovely smile, bright open eyes, level, round and small nostrils — these in a woman signify that she will be the source of happiness). Lo, the lines on my feet, patterned like a lotus, were said to be sure marks that I would be crowned the wife of an Emperor. But, no one has ever found in me any of the marks that indicate widowhood. (She whose toes are laid one upon another will survive two husbands and will be under the control of others. She whose little toe does not touch the ground when she walks will bring about the death of three husbands. If a single hair grows in a sac, she will be a queen; if there are two, she will lead a life of happiness; but if there are three she will be a widow). The word Padma means one who has the marks of happiness and wealth on her feet. My feet are adorned with such lotus lines. And it follows that I should enjoy wealth and happiness. But all this will be true only if my Dasarathi is alive. My hair is soft and level and black. My brows do not meet. My knees are round and smooth; my teeth also do not touch one another; the sides of my head, my eyes, hands, feet, and knees and thighs are high and full. (She whose knees are hairless, round, lovely and smooth, will be the wife of a king — *Skanda).* My fingers are straight and with round nails. My breasts are close set and full and my nipples low. My naval is majestic and raised all round. My sides and breast are fashioned correctly. My complexion is lovely like the sheen of gems. My toes, feet, and heels are evenly placed as I walk. All the world praises me as one endowed with every kind of auspicious mark and sign. My hands and feet are covered with lines like the grain of barley. My fingers placed together show no gap; and they are red like saffron. Experts in the science of body-marks have always praised me as one with the most charming smile. But what the best astrologers said, that I and my husband should be installed on the throne of the world it is all proved false. (The *Skandapurana* state that the toe-nails should be prominent and round and lovely. The fingers must be proportionate to the hand, neither too long nor too short, and of the same length in either hand. The lines known as Nandyavartta and Pradakshina adorn the palms of her who will be a queen). Rama and Lakshmana sought me far and wide over Janasthana and discovered my whereabouts. They crossed this ocean for my sake and yet have met their death in a puddle caused by a cow's hoof. They who have been the death of Kabandha, Viradha, Vali, Khara, Dushana, and many others have now fallen victims to the magic arts of Indrajit. Alas, have you not in your quivers the mighty magic weapons of Varuna, Agneya, Indra, Vayavya, and Brahmasiras? Rama and Lakshmana, like Indra and Upendra, have fallen before Indrajit who strikes unseen through his arts of illusion; and they have left me lonely and helpless! No enemy, though he be endowed with the speed of thought, can ever return alive once Rama's eyes have fallen on him on the field of battle. But nothing is impossible to Time and Fate is inexorable. Else, could Rama and Lakshmana be struck down by a *rakshasa?* I do not grieve so much for Rama or Lakshmana, for myself or my mother. But my mother-in-law, the good lady Kausalya, artless and simple, when I think of her, I cannot bear my grief. She is ever expecting us; she is ever on the watch for us. "Rama, Lakshmana, and Sita, my dear children, when will they return? When shall I see them and be happy again"; Thus in many ways did Sita lament over the princes.

Then Trijata said to her, Lady, Why do you grieve? Your husband is alive. I have good reason for saying this. If the general of any army is dead, the troops lose their spirit; they are dozed, and like a ship without a pilot, fall into disorder and confusion. Now, such is not the plight of this monkey-host. Behold their faces bright with joy and their eyes blazing with wrath. Again, with calm, untroubled hearts, these keep watch over Rama and Lakshmana till they should come back to their senses. I tell you this out of my love for you. Assure yourself that Rama and Lakshmana are alive and that no danger can come to them; these auspicious signs are proof enough. Never till now have I spoken an untruth; nor would I do so in the future. Your noble conduct and pure life have won my heart. I have said all this through my love for you. Indra and his *devas* can never hope to defeat Rama. The reasons I have stated and the dream I had are the grounds of my faith. Let this be. Observe the faces of Rama and Lakshmana. Though unconscious, they preserve the lustre of their form and features; the grace of Lakshmi still shines on them. The face of deadmen and of cowards are horribly ugly. Janaki! put away grief and doubt concerning these princes. How can they be other than alive?"

Sita listened to these words, sweet as streams of nectar; Sorrow fell away from her and she spoke over joined palms, "Lady, may your words prove true." (They who tell us of the goodness and glory of the Lord, should be honoured as teachers, no matter who they are). Sita and Trijata returned to *Asoka* grove on the car Pushpaka. But for all that Trijata had spoken to give her courage, Sita could not but think of Rama and Lakshmana, as she was back in her place of confinement, with the *rakshasis* around her. She imagined that the princes were there before her and was plunged in unspeakable grief at the plight they were in.

CHAPTER 49

RAMA COMES BACK TO SENSES

SUGRIVA and the other mighty monkey-heroes overwhelmed by grief, stood round Rama and Lakshmana, bound with terrible serpent arrows; their bodies covered with blood, stretched on the ground and breathing hard like serpents hissing. Meanwhile, Rama came out of the faint and opened his eyes. Was he not matchless in manly courage and strength. He found Lakshmana lying by his side riddled with arrows, covered with blood, his face faded and dusty. In deep sorrow he lamented over him "Should I cling to life even after I have seen you, my brother, struck down by a puny *rakshasa* and lying on the ground? What do I gain now even if I get Sita back? Searching far and wide one may come upon another woman like Sita, but one can never hope to have again a mighty hero like Lakshmana for one's brother. If he, the dear child of Sumitra, should die, I shall give up my life in the presence of these monkeys. She, his mother Sumitra, entrusted him to me and sent him to help me. How can I face her, myself alone alive, and Lakshmana lost to us. When the ladies Kausalya, Kaikeyi and Sumitra ask me, "Where is Lakshmana?" What answer shall I give? How can I console the lady Sumitra as she wails and writhes in agony for the loss of her son? How can I meet the scornful question of the mother: "Why did you return alone, leaving behind Lakshmana, who went into the forest with yourself?" How will I tell my brothers Bharata and Satruguna this terrible news? Well, I shall quit this body straightaway; I have no wish to live. It was wicked of me to have brought with me Lakshmana to the forest. No good man would have done a thing like this. Dasaratha bade me go to the forest; but what right had I to take Lakshmana with me? There he lies on the ground having thrown away his life for me. Fie upon myself! My boy, you used to console me when I gave way to grief. But now I wail for you. And you have no life to wipe away my tears. How did it happen that you were struck down by your enemies in this very field where you have stuck down countless *rakshasas?* As the sun descends on the mountain of the west, you have sunk on the bed of arrows surrounded by arrows like rays and hidden by torrents of blood, red like the evening twlight. (The sun of the solar race now takes his rest. Perhaps you do not speak to me, because of the pain caused by the arrows piercing your vitals. You ever proclaim the boundless love you have for me. With eager joy you came with me to the woods; even so shall I go with you to the halls of Death. You are the dearest of my kinsfolk. All your actions tend towards my highest good. And you have come to this pass solely through my wickedness. Lakshmana, the mighty hero, never spoke to me harshly or against my interests even when he was in the grip of wrath. Before Kartavirya, Arjuna could shoot five hundred arrows with his thousand hands; but my Lakshmana could do the same with his two hands. The hero whose weapons could meet and master the magic weapons of Indra himself, how could he be overcome by a puny *rakshasa?* You, for whom no bed is enough, is it right for you to lie on this bare ground?

I have given my word, Sugriva, that I shall crown Vibhishana as the king of the *rakshasas;* if I fail to fulfil it, the grief will burn me quite. Hence I have to stay here. Go back to Kishkinda this very moment and take your forces over the sea. Perhaps the mighty Ravana may come here and give you trouble, when he knows that I am not here, Hanuman, Jambavan, Dhumra, Angada, Mainda, Dvivida, Kesari, Sampati, Gavaya, Gaja and Sarabha and the other monkey-heroes, who were all ready to throw away their lives for me, the prowess they have displayed and the feats they performed in the battle and the fame they have won to themselves — all this is impossible for others. Sugriva, you have done to the uttermost everything that the best of friends and the dearest of comrades should do. Is it not your sole-concern to discharge the duties and responsibilities of a friend? And ye, monkey-warriors, all of you have rendered without fear and afraid of *dharma,* the highest service that best and the dearest of friends can render. Now I give you leave to go where you will." Hearing this, the monkeys, red-eyed with grief, shed tears like mountain streams during the rains. Then Vibhishana stationed the troops at their places and armed with his club ran up to where Raghava was. As he approached, black of hue like a mountain of collyrium, monkeys mistook him for Indrajit; and fled in afright in all directions.

CHAPTER 50

RAMA AND LAKSHMANA LIBERATED FROM NAGAPASA

THEN Sugriva cried out, "Wonder of Wonders", like a ship struck by a storm in mid-ocean, our ranks are seized with panic; I would know why. "And Angada replied, "Do you not see the Raghu heroes struck down by arrows and lying stretched on a bed of arrows, their bodies covered with blood. What other reason is needed?" But Sugriva rejoined, "Not so, some great terror has fallen upon them. Look at these monkeys throwing away their weapons and running in all directions. With terror in their eyes and not daring to look back, they flee fast dragging one another long. Not in the least ashamed of it, not heeding those that are struck down, they leap forward in their wild course."

Meanwhile Vibhishana came, armed with his club; he blessed Sugriva and saw Rama recovered from his swoon. Then Sugriva turned to Jambavan standing his side and said, "O! our forces run in blind terror mistaking our dearest friend Vibhishana for Indrajit. The thing to do now is tell them the truth, stop the retreat and put cheer into their hearts. "Jambavan did so; the monkey-hosts put faith in his words and took a good look at Vibhishana; fear fell from them, and they came back to their places. Vibhishana, observing the bodies of Rama and Lakshmana riddled with arrows, became agitated, wiped their eyes with water and wailed aloud in uncontrollable grief :

"Most mighty and most valiant, ever fond of battle, these heroes have come to this pass, because of the foul methods of war adopted by the *rakshasas*. My brother is a monster of cruelty and his son more wicked than he. That wretch, with his *rakshasa* meanness and magic arts, has deceived these princes. And thereby he has brought undying infamy to his father. These princes are innocent of guile. I curse my fate that I have to see them writhing on the ground like porcupines, riddled with arrows and drenched in blood. I placed my hopes of prosperity on their valour and now they lie stretched on the ground, unconscious and about to die. Alas! I am alive alone and those are gone. I have lost all my expectations; and the kingdom too. My enemy Ravana has fulfilled his word and is happy now!'' Sugriva clasped to his breast most fondly that best of devotees and consoled him, saying: ''Most righteous one! doubt not that the kingdom of Lanka will be yours. Ravana, his sons, his kith and kin, will not live in happiness; believe me. Our protectors can suffer no harm from these serpent bonds. The worst that can come to them is that they will be unconscious for a while. Soon they will recover their senses and destroy Ravana and all his *rakshasas,''* Then he turned to Sushena, his father-in-law, who was standing near, and said ''Go straight to Kishkindha with Rama and Lakshmana and our monkeys. I shall dispose of Ravana, his sons, his kith and kin, and bring back Janaki to the side of Rama even as Indra of old brought back Lakshmi that had parted from him''.

Hearing this, Sushena replied, ''I was present at that dreadful battle between the gods and *asuras* of yore. Then the *danavas,* most skilful of archers struck and hit the *devas* again and again with their wonderful weapons. Some *devas* writhed in agony unbearable; some lay senseless; some lost their lives; then Brihaspati saved them from the danger that threatened them, using wonderful arts like *Mritasanjivini* and other charms and herbs. Sampati, Panasa and the other monkeys know the mountain where these herbs are found. Where the gods and the *asuras* churned the ocean of milk in the far past, in those very mountains of Chandragiri and Dronagiri, they have been planted and nurtured by the gods. Despatch forthwith some monkey-warriors to bring us the potent herbs *Sanjivikarani,* and *Visalyakarani.* Let the son of Vayu here undertake the mission.''

Meanwhile the clouds were lashed with lightning and roared dreadfully. A fierce wind had in its mighty grip those clouds and the waters of the ocean. The earth quaked in affright. Lofty trees fell uprooted into the sea. Serpents with huge bodies that lived in Lanka and all creatures of the deep sought refuge into the depths of the ocean. Some time later, the Lord Garuda appeared before the monkeys. The mighty son of Vinata blazed like a fire; at the sight of him the serpent bonds that bound Rama and Lakshmana were no more to be seen. The Lord Garuda looked on those mighty princes and passed his hands over their faces like the full moon. At once the wounds on their bodies disappeared, and they shone with the lustre of molten gold. The power to overcome foes, the sensitiveness to dishonour strength of body, radiance, firmness of purpose in mighty ventures, keenness of intellect to pierce into subtleties, the faculty of memory, all these qualities were redoubled. The Lord Garuda clasped to his breast most fondly the two princes who were like Indra and Upendra.

Then Rama turned to the king of birds, and said "Through your grace, we have escaped from the great danger that Indrajit threatened us with and we have been restored to our strength, valour and energy. When I see you it is as if I saw Dasaratha, my father and Aja, my grandfather and my heart rejoices. May I know who you are, wonderful in form and adorned with perfumes and flowers, garments and ornaments of the world of gods." And to him replied, the Lord Garuda, tears of joy blinding his eyes, "Raghuvira, I am a dear comrade of yours. (This is so, since the lord has chosen him for his conveyance). Believe me, I am your life-breaths assuming form and walking about. They know me as Garuda. I came here to be of help to you. None can free you from these serpent bonds, created by the magic of Indrajit, the cruel monster, not even the most valiant and mighty *danavas,* not even Indra himself guarded by his gods. These serpents come of the line of Kadru, sharp of fangs and deadly of venom are they. The magic of the son of Ravana gave them the form of serpents with which to torture you. Knower of *dharma!* hero of unfailing prowess! You and your brother Lakshmana, the terror of his foes, are fortunate indeed. Hearing of the danger that befell you, I came here swiftly, out of my friendship for you and impelled by a sense of duty. You are freed from the bonds of this dreadful weapon. You should be most careful at all times. It is natural for the *rakshasas,* it is the tradition of their race, to use fraud and magic in battle. But to heroes like you, pure of conduct, strength lies in straightness. Never take the *rakshasa* on trust when you fight with them. From what took place now, know that the *rakshasas* are cunning and deceitful." "Garuda embraced Rama close and said, "Friend, Raghunatha, Embodiment of *dharma* , ocean of compassion even for your worst enemies!

I take leave of you. Ask not now how I am your comrade. When you lay now your foes on the battle-field, you will know it all yourself. Your fiery arrows will consume Lanka and all its *rakshasas,* except infants and old men in it. You will slay Ravana and recover Janaki''. After delivering Rama and Lakshmana from the danger that hung over them, the king of birds circumambulated and embraced them most fondly and coursed back quickly through the sky even like the Lord Vayu. The monkey-lords, seeing that the danger loomed over the Raghava princes had been removed by the grace of the Almighty, waved their tails aloft in sheer joy and roared like lions. As war drums, kettle drums, conches and other auspicious instruments sounded on all sides; some roared; some slapped their shoulders; and others took mighty leaps. They uprooted lofty trees and broke off mountain tops and stood ready for battle. They battered down the gates of Lanka and shouted in glee. At this the *rakshasas* were struck with wonder and fear; as clouds roar and thunder dreadfully at night about the end of summer, the monkey-warriors challenged their enemies to battle, roaring loud enough to split their hearts.

(Q. Raghuvira declared that he could destroy all beings in this Universe, if he but lifted his little finger. His might and wisdom are boundless. How then did he like an impotent fool lie on the ground, foiled by Indrajit and drenched in blood?).

A. He did so in order to sustain *dharma* and right conduct in the world. Though good men may meet with deadly dangers, yet they are not destroyed. Sinners and wicked wretches may rejoice that their hopes have been realised, they will be disappointed and will meet with destruction themselves. This is the lesson taught by the episode of the serpent bonds.

Q. The gods prayed to the Lord to slay Ravana; and assenting to it, He came down as Rama, did he not?

A. True. The incarnation compassed not only the destruction of the wicked but also the establishment of *dharma.* If his purpose was limited to the slaying of Ravana there was no call for him to take all this trouble. He has to lead all the four orders of society to live according to their respective *dharma.*

Q. Could He not teach these truths clearly and directly?

A. Why, the *srutis* and *smritis* have tried to do so and failed. It was necessary for Him to teach them by example. And he took human shape for this very purpose").

CHAPTER 51

DHUMRAKSHA GOES OUT TO FIGHT

RAVANA and his *rakshasas* were surprised to hear the monkey-warriors shout for joy. "Ministers! there must be some reason for this untimely joy which makes these monkeys roar like clouds during the rain. The seas are troubled by their shouts. Rama and Lakshmana lie unconscious bound with keen arrows and the monkeys shout with joy; this rouses grave doubts in me. Messengers go hence as swiftly as you can and bring me news why the monkeys rejoice when they have lost their leaders and should be plunged in grief". Forthwith countless *rakshasas* clambered up the fortress walls and observed what took place in the monkey camp. Sugriva was marshalling his troops, and making arrangements for their safety; Rama and Lakshmana, freed from the serpent bonds, had regained consciousness and were leading the monkeys as before. With troubled hearts and faded faces, they took back the news to Ravana. "Your Majesty! Indrajit bound Rama and Lakshmana by his arrows and threw them senseless on the ground. Like mad elephants breaking asunder the ropes that bind them, these men have got rid of their serpent bonds; and move about like lions in their pride of strength." Ravana was filled with anxiety and his face was pale as he said. "By the grace of the gods, these serpent arrows shine like the sun and they never go in vain. With these did Indrajit, matchless in skill, bind Rama and Lakshmana. If they should free themselves from these arrwos, it portends, I fear, great danger to our army. These arrows, are as potent as the mighty serpents Vasuki, Takshaka, and Karkotaka. None so far have escaped their bonds. And if these fail, I do not know what we should do." And he was sad and thoughtful. After a while, furious with anger, he hissed forth like a terrible serpent, "Hear you, Dhumraksha! what need have I for anxiety so long as you are with me ? Take what troops you want, go forth now and deal instant death to Rama, Lakshmana and the monkeys."

Dhumraksha was mightily pleased at being the first of the generals, chosen to fight with the enemies; he went round Ravana in reverence and coming out addressed the leader of his troops; "Why delay yet? Let our troops be ready to march forth." Knowing it to be, the order of His Majesty, the captains obeyed and countless *rakshasas* marched forth from all quarters and hid the earth from view. They were decked with war bells in their waists and armed from head to foot. With frightful forms and boundless strength, they resembled huge cloud-banks during the rains roaring frightfully. Some were cased in fine armour; others drove on cars adorned with flags, and golden windows and drawn by mules with diverse faces. Some were mounted on horses swift as thought; some on mad elephants; and they marched forth to battle like fierce tigers. The car of Dhumraksha was drawn by mules with the faces of wolves, tigers, and lions and decked with every kind of ornament. He laughed like thunder and, surrouned by dreadful *rakshasas,* came to the western fortress gate where Hanuman stood expectant. On his way he was warned by many evil omens. A huge and terrible vulture fell on top of his car. Many vultures fell in a mass on the top of his banner. A headless trunk, white and dreadful, covered with blood and crying aloud, fell in front of Dhumraksha. The clouds showered blood; the earth quaked in terror; strong winds blew against him and rumbled like mighty thunder; the quarters were covered with darkness and nothing could be seen. At those dreadful portents, Dhumraksha was filled with sadness. His *rakshasas* were in the grip of fear and confusion. Thus did that *rakshasa,* Dhumraksha of boundless strength and dreadful valour, issue forth from the city with his *rakshasa*-heroes, eager for a fight with the monkeys. He beheld the monkey-troops protected by Rama and boundless like the ocean.

CHAPTER 52

DEATH OF DHUMRAKSHA

SEEING Dhumraksha, of terrible prowess, marching forth to battle accompanied by his *rakshasas,* the monkey-warriors shouted in joy, eager for the prey. Then a dreadful battle ensued between the monkeys and the *rakshasas.* The *rakshasas* were hit with trees, mountain peaks, and blocks of stone. On the other hand, the monkeys were struck with tridents, swords, hatchets and arrows. Countless *rakshasas* slew the monkeys with keen arrows carrying eagle feathers with maces, bars and other weapons. Riddled with shafts, cloven with tridents, the monkeys were enraged; and without the least fear, performed wondrous deeds of valour with trees and stones for weapons. Shouting their names and deeds of fame, they sprang on the *rakshasas,* dragged them down, and roared like lions. Some *rakshasas* were ground to dust by trees and mountain peaks. Some vomited blood. Some lay with torn flanks, some crushed by huge slabs. Some were bit to shreds. Banners and flags broken to pieces, wheels shattered, axles cloven and the yoked mules killed, the cars were strewn over the ground. Elephants of mountainous bulk; *rakshasa*-heroes like elephants in their madness; huge mountain tops pushed by the monkeys; heaps of dead horses, elephant drivers with headless trunk and horsemen hid the battlefield from view.

The monkey-heroes of dreadful valour leapt upon the *rakshasas* and tore at their faces most frightfully. And those rangers of the night, wan of face and with dishevelled hair, fainted away on the earth, unable to stand·the stench of blood. Some shouted dreadfully in their mad fury and struck at the monkeys with their hands, hand as adamant. In their turn, the monkeys sprang at them with agility and slew the *rakshasas* with fists, feet, teeth and trees. Unable to bear that onslaught, the enemy began to flee in all directions.

At this, Dhumuraksha, the great hero, was beside himself with rage, and began to slay innumerable monkeys. Some, ground down by huge spears, vomited blood; some were hit by iron bars and lay stretched on the ground; some had their limbs broken by whirl sticks, some were struck by smooth-headed rods and lay dead, their senses in a whirl. Some were pierced with tridents. Some were hit by the *rakshasas* and driven from the field; some lay with hearts cloven. Some lay with their bowels protruding. Thus did the combatants on both side fight most fearfully. That dreadful sound, intensified by the noise of falling mountains and trees, made the hearts of all beings quake in terror. In that battle the bows took the place of the *vina* (Indian lute). The bow strings were the wires stretched upon it. The spasmodic hiccough of the wounded men kept time; the song was but the dying whispers of spent men; such was the music of battle.

Dhumraksha bent his bow, struck the monkeys with arrowy showers, scattered them all round and laughed at them. Seeing the monkeys sore confused and staggering to and fro, Anjaneya ran forth quickly with a huge boulder in his hands. Valiant as God Vayu himself, his eyes afire with anger, he threw the boulder on the car of Dhumraksha. Seeing this the *rakshasa* jumped out of the car, mace in hand. And the stone smashed the car, the horses, the banners, the bow, the weapons and the driver. Maruti, with uprooted trees, struck down the *rakshasas* in crowds. He caused a stream of blood to roll over the field as he brought down the *rakshasas* with broken heads and limbs. He made the *rakshasa*-forces disappear from the battle-ground; next he ran towards Dhumraksha with a mountain peak in his hand. Therupon the *rakshasa* whirled aloft his mace bristling with iron spikes, and sprang at Maruti whom he struck on the head with terrible wrath. But Hanuman, endowed with matchless strength, even like the Lord Vayu, made light of it and struck straight at the head of Dhumraksha with that huge block. His limbs broken, he fell like a lofty mountain crashing down and gave up life. At the sight of their leader thus done to death, the *rakshasas* fled in terror and ran towards Lanka for refuge; and the monkeys chased them and slew many. Thus did Anjaneya slay Dhumraksha and his troops, causing streams of blood to course over the ground. Though tired he was glad at the slaughter of his enemies. The monkeys lauded and praised the hero. (The death of Dhumraksha falls on the second day of the fortnight).

CHAPTER 53

VAJRADAMSHTRA GOES OUT TO FIGHT

RAVANA was wild with wrath at the news of the death of Dhumraksha; in his excitement he hissed like the serpent of Time and roared out an order to the mighty Vajradamshtra, "Bravest of heroes, the brave, take with you what troops you will and rid the earth of Rama, Lakshmana and the monkeys".

"Your Majesty's orders shall be obeyed" replied Vajradamshtra; he went round the king, bowed down to him with reverence, and marched forth to battle surrounded by countless *rakshasas.* Countless chariots drawn by elephants, horses, mules and camels; and graced by banners and flags, footsoldiers armed with rods, *tomaras,* tridents, bars, spears, nooses, swords, *saktis,* wheels, maces, axes and other weapons; decked with curious garments and ornaments and wielding wonderful magic missiles — all these followed Vajradamshtra. He himself shone resplendent with rare armlets, earrings, cases in fine armour quivers on his back and mighty bow in hand, he circumambulated the car before ascending it. Well-trained elephants moved gracefully like lofty mountains, and renowned warriors armed to the teeth rode on them. The black-hued *rakshasa*-forces shone in their bright garments and ornaments; and marched on with shouts and roars, like black storm clouds, during the rains, with lightning and thunder. As they came out through the southern gate besieged by Angada, from the bright, clear and cloudless sky descended blazing meteors; jackals howled fearfully, belching out flames; the inauspicious cries of dreadful beasts foretold the destruction of the *rakshasas,* who were struck with fear and confusion thereat; but Vajradamshtra heeded nothing. Strong, lustrous and skilled in magic, he never lost his courage, but eager for battle marched at the head of his troops. The monkeys, beholding the enemy, roared with joy and made the quarters tremble.

Then the two forces, assuming frightful shapes joined in fierce battle each intent on defeating the other. Some rushed forward in mad haste and soon lay stretched on the ground, their heads broken, their bodies cleft and blood issuing from their wounds. Some kept on a ceaseless discharge of weapons and fought most skilfully retracing never a step. The noise of falling trees, mountains, blocks, and weapons shook the earth and sky. The twang of bent bows drawn to the ear, the blare of martial instruments like conch, drum and kettle-drum joined in a loud, indistinct noise. Some had shot all their weapons and took to fighting with hands and fists. Some *rakshasas,* hit by hands, feet and knees, lay on the ground with broken limbs. Maddened monkeys threw huge boulders at the *rakshasas* and ground them to dust. Vajradamshtra made the monkeys flee in terror by his keen arrows and walked up and down the battle-field like the god of death blazing with his noose in hand on the day of universal destruction. The *rakshasas,* skilful in the use of every weapon were beside themselves with fury and struck down innumerable monkeys. Angada in uncontrollable wrath, hissed frightfully like the storm Samvartaka on the day of dissoulution and, uprooting a huge tree, destroyed the *rakshasas* as a lion destroys the smaller beasts of the forest. Those that stood up and faced the monkey-hero, whose body shone and eyes flashed fire, were for all their valour struck down like uprooted trees with broken heads and shattered limbs. The battle-ground was completely covered with cars, horses, curious banners, *rakshasas,* and monkeys; it was decorated with ornaments and weapons; blood ran in torrents over it; and it shone like the night in autumn. Like serried clouds scattered by a mighty wind, the *rakshasa*-host swayed and staggered under the dreadful onslaught of Angada.

CHAPTER 54

DEATH OF VAJRADAMSHTRA

THE triumph of Angada and destruction of his forces infuriated Vajradamshtra, the mighty hero. He bent his dreadful bow, twanged it in tones of thunder and covered the monkeys with an arrowy shower. His warriors struck at them with every kind of weapon. In their turn, the monkey-heroes hit the *rakshasas* with trees, mountain tops and blocks of stone. The *rakshasas* discharged countless weapons at the monkeys who met these missiles in a shower of trees, boulders and mountain peaks. Both sides fought dreadfully without retreating an inch. Broken heads, broken legs, shorn arms, bodies riddled with arrows and drenched with blood covered all the battle-field without the distinction of friend or foe. Crowds of eagles, vultures, crows and jackals roamed freely among them. Some ran away in terror at the sight of headless trunks. Severed hands, arms, heads, legs and limbs kept falling down. Thus did the monkeys attack the *rakshasa*-forces and made them take to their heels in terror. Thereat Vajradamshtra shot fire from his eyes, sprang among the monkeys, bent his bow and clove them asunder with his keen shafts decked with eagle-feathers. With great skill he with a single arrow pierced five, six,seven,eight, nine or ten monkeys at a time. Some had their arms cut down; some had their bodies cloven; some had their heads shattered; and like created beings taking refuge with Brahma, they ran towards Angada. That monkey-hero, seeing his forces thus sore beset, gazed intently at Vajradamshtra with eyes red with fury.

Then Vajradamshtra and Angada sprang at each other like mad elephants. The *rakshasa* pierced Angada with many an arrow in the vital parts till blood flowed in torrents from his wounds and he stood there like an elephant in rut pierced by javelins. Then the son of Vali tore up by the roots a lofty tree and with all his strength hit Vajradamshtra on the head. Unperturbed, the *rakshasa*-hero splintered the tree with his shafts. Angada threw at him a huge stone and roared aloud. Before it could reach the car, the *rakshasa,* club in hand, leaped down to the ground. It crushed to powder the car, the horses and the driver. Then Angada tore off a tree-covered mountain and hurled it at the head of Vajradamshtra. Blood flowed from his mouth; his mind was in confusion; he leaned upon his club and swooned away for a while. Then he came back to himself, whirled his club aloft and hit Angada in his breast in mad wrath. Then he threw away the weapon and they fought each other with their fists. They hit at each other, grew tired for a while, and vomited blood, as they fought like the planets, Mars and Mercury. Again taking up keen swords and strong shields covered with the skin of oxen, they fought in uncontrollable fury and used curious patterns of footwork each, intent on defeating the other, each struck and hit and tore the other mercilessly. Wounded all over, and drenched with blood, they shone like tall trees, adorned with red flowers. Fatigued by this hard fight, they rested for a while on their knees. Then like a deadly cobra struck on the head by a rod, Angada hissed at his foe, sprang at the *rakshasa* and in a moment shore off the head of Vajradamshtra with his keen blade. The head, its eyes rolling in anger and moustaches bristling with wrath, fell far away. Seeing this, the *rakshasas,* overcome with terror and dazed, ran towards Lanka with wan faces and heads hanging down. As they ran, the monkeys chased and struck them dead. The son of Vali, equal in valour to his grandfather, Indra, engaged Vajradamshtra in a terrible duel before the eyes of the monkey-hosts and sent him to his death. And he rejoiced mightily. Then even as the gods praised on high their king with a thousand eyes when he returned victorious over the *daityas,* the whole monkey-army croud round Angada and welcomed him with shouts of praise.

CHAPTER 55

AKAMPANA GOES OUT TO FIGHT

HEARING the news of the death of Vajradamshtra at the hands of Angada, Ravana turned to Prahasta that stood by with joined palms and said, "Akampana, expert in every kind of fight, let him march forth with troops of dreadful prowess. He will make our foes beg for mercy and shield our armies from all danger. He is a general of great renown; he is ever intent upon my welfare; he is ever eager for battle. He will defeat Rama, Lakshmana and Sugriva and destroy the other terrible monkeys".

Prahasta carried out the orders of Ravana and very soon the forces were ready. They marched forth to battle with frightful eyes and faces and armed with every kind of weapon. Akampana led them in a huge car. He was dark and lustrous like a cloud, his voice was like thunder; frightful *rakshasas* surrounded him; and pricelss ornaments decked his limbs. He derived his name Akampana (unshakable) from his firmness in many dreadful battles. Like the sun amoung the planets, he shone in splendour amoung the *rakshasas*. Even as he marched forth for battle, the noble steeds yoked to his car grew wan and weary all at once. His left eye throbbed; the clear sky was covered with black clouds and torn with lightning, rain and storm. Birds and beasts, cried dreadfully. With the shoulders of a lion and the gait of a tiger, Akampana disregarded those omens and came to the field of battle.

Then the *rakshasas* roared with joy till the seas were stirred. Hearing this, the monkey-forces grew confused, piled up trees, mountains and blocks of stone and awaited the foes. Then the monkeys and the *rakshasas* began again a dreadful fight making light of their lives for the sake of Rama and Ravana; Both sides were strong, valiant, of mountainous build and determined to win. Their angry roars and trumpetings were carried far and wide. Red dust rose from the earth, fearful to behold, and hid from view monkeys, *rakshasas* and the four quarters, banners, flags, armour, horses, weapons, cars, nothing was visible. As they sprang at each other, their shouts and war cries alone could be heard; but no forms were seen. In that utter darkness both sides struck blindly and killed their own men, in mad fury. Friend or foe, they fought on and made the earth miry with flowing blood. That laid the dust and then the battle-field came to view, covered with corpses. Trees, *saktis* (a kind of magic weapon), blocks of stone, spears, and other weapons, bare hands and fists, were freely used in that fight between the monkeys and the *rakshasas*. The monkeys hit the *rakshasas* with trees and stones; the enemy met them with sharp tridents, keen swords, spears and other weapons. Akampana, enraged, put courage into the hearts of the *rakshasas* and urged them to perform frightful feats. Then Kumuda, Nala, Mainda and Dvivida came there quickly and destroyed the *rakshasas* in crowds with trees as large as mountains.

CHAPTER 56

DEATH OF AKAMPANA

THE sight was too much for Akampana, the redoubtable warrior; he waved his bow aloft and said to his driver, "Look at those monkeys, destroying our forces beyond count. Take my car there; where many a monkey-warriors, strong and frightful of bulk and armed with trees and mountain peaks await me there. I cannot keep refrain from killing those so eager for battle. If I neglect them now, they will despatch the entire *rakshasa*-forces to the hall of death. Then he drove his car amidst the monkeys and pierced them with his cruel arrows, as he went. They were riddled with them and unable to bear the pain, ran away in all directions. They could not stand against him for a moment. No need to speak of fighting with him.

Thus did the monkey-hosts fall a prey to Akampana's arrows, as if they were in the grip of Yama. Thereat Hanuman came forward to help the monkeys. And they surrounded him most gladly. Endowed with natural strength, they were led by Anjaneya the mightiest of the mighty. Akampana cast his eyes on Maruti that towered aloft like a huge mountain, and, seized with a frantic rage, he riddled him with his arrows that fell on him like heavy showers on mount Mahendra. But unperturbed, Hanuman pondered over the means of staying the *rakshasa.* Suddenly, he sprang upon him; the impact was so terrific that the earth quaked. The figure of the monkey-lord, shining in splendour and roaring frightfully, blinded the eyes of all beholders, like the sun surrounded by his thousand rays. Realising that he had no weapon in hand he quickly tore up a mountain, whirled it aloft with one hand and hit Akampana with it, roaring aloud the while. Seeing that Anjaneya faced him even as Indra faced the *asura* Namuchi with his *vajra* in battle, the *rakshasa* intercepted the mountain, and ground it to powder with many *ardhachandra* arrows. Then Hanuman, beside himself with wrath, uprooted a tall tree that had grown like a mountain, and whirled it round and round with its branches and laughed in tones of thunder. Huge trees crashed down with the speed of his thighs, as he ran towards the *rakshasa.* His feet clove the earth. And with that tree he slew elephants, elephant drivers, cars, car warriors and foot-soldiers. Like the god of death who brings destruction to all created beings, Anjaneya scoured the ground in mad fury; and at the sight of him the *rakshasas* fled in terror. Then Akampana roared with wrath and pierced Maruti with fourteen keen arrows. But Maruti only shone with greater lustre, like a lofty mountain covered with trees or an *Asoka* tree in full blossom or like fire without its smoke. The son of Vayu, huge of body and boundless in valour and intelligence, suddenly tore up another tree and dealt a terrific blow on Akampana's head. Unable to bear the frightful blow that Maruti delivered in his wrath, Akampana fell down on the earth and breathed his last.

The *rakshasas* shook with fear as they beheld it, even like lofty trees in the grip of an earthquake. They cast off their weapons and ran towards Lanka, while the monkeys chased and slew them in crowds. With dishevelled hair, disgraced, discomfited, dazed and sweating, they ran panting. They entered the city, trampling one another. They turned back often to see if they were followed and took shelter in Lanka.

Then the Monkey-hosts gathered round Anjaneya and showered praises upon him. And he returned the compliment. The monkeys were utterly beside themselves with exultation; they shouted until they were hoarse; and they dragged out and tormented forth the *rakshasas* that were yet alive. Thus did Hanuman slay Akampana and the *rakshasa*-warriors; and win glory, even as Mahavishnu in the far past did by defeating Bali, the *asura*. And the gods on high, with Rama and Lakshmana, Vibhishana, Sugriva and the other monkey-lords, extolled Anjaneya, the son of Vayu.

CHAPTER 57

PRAHASTA SETS OUT TO FIGHT

HEARING the news of the death of Akampana, Ravana was furious; his face grew wan and he looked intently at his ministers. He thought for a while, took counsel with his ministers and decided to review that morning the troops stationed in the city. It was decked with flags, banners and garlands. Bands of *rakshasas* guarded it most carefully. Battalions of troops were stationed all over their camp. Seeing the capital besieged by the monkeys on all sides, Ravana said to Prahasta, "It is impossible to raise this siege unless we destroy our foes in battle. Either I or Kumbhakarna, yourself, Indrajit or Nikumba must take up this task. Collect what forces you will, go forth to where the monkeys are and come back with victory. The monkey-hosts will take to flight when they see you approaching them; they are fickle of temper. Will they stay on the battle-field once they hear the roar of the *rakshasa*-warriors? Unsteady of mind, untrained in warfare they cannot stay at a place for long. They will die of sheer fright, like elephants when they hear the roar of lions. If their armies are scattered in all directions, Rama and Lakshamana will be distracted in mind and fall into your hands with none to support them, It is not a rule that those that go out to fight meet with death: Even if death befalls us, we would have earned undying fame and the heavenly worlds. But if we do not fight, we are sure to die at the hands of our foes. And such a death brings with it disgrace and hell. Tell me what you think for or against this view."

Thereat, Prahasta counselled Ravana even as Brihaspati counsels the king of the *devas,* "Your Majesty! What has now come upon us, is the very thing that Vibhishana, myself, and others have discussed and concluded long ago. But there was no agreement among us. We held conflicting opinions and quarrelled. That was why the decision was not acted on. Was it not decided that welfare and glory would be ours, if we restored Sita to Rama, and that ruin and infamy would be our portion if we did not do so? Now, I have received at your hands countless gifts, honours and benefits. You have exalted me with your kind words and precious praise. It is my duty at all times to fulfil your wishes. I have no other joy in life than that. My life, my wife, my children, my wealth, I count as straw, where your interests are concerned. Today I will offer up my life as an oblation in the fire of battle."

Then he turned to the generals that stood by and said, "Let a huge *rakshasa*-force be ready here soon. Like the thunderbolt of Indra will my arrows fall upon the monkeys and prepare a sumptuous feast for the eagles, vultures and other birds of prey". The *rakshasa*-troops got ready accordingly. With the sheen of their weapons and the noise of their shouting, the city was like a rut. Some poured oblations in the sacred fire for victory and safe return; some bowed before the *Brahamanas* with flowers and perfumes. The breeze blew soft, wafting the scent of ghee, flowers and other perfumes. The *rakshasas,* eager for battle, wore garlands that charged with enchantment to ensure them victory. Armed with fine armour and bows, they came forward quickly, saluted Ravana and gathered round Prahasta.

He took leave of his master, caused the terrible war-drums to be beaten and ascended his magnificent chariot. It was furnished with every kind of weapon. Horses swift as the wind, were harnessed to it. They were guided by an expert driver. Brilliant like the sun, and charming like the moon, fitted with excellent wheels, axles, and spokes, it was effectively guarded against attack. Shining with golden windows, it seemed to smile on all beholders. ascending his chariot and receiving Ravana's orders for battle, Prahasta emerged from Lanka, surrounded by the *rakshasa*-forces that surged like the ocean. Then the noise of the kettle-drums joined to the softer notes of lutes and other musical instruments, and the blast of conches spread over the waters like the rumblings of dark clouds. The *rakshasas* that marched before Prahasta, huge of bulk like mountains and frightful in shape, raised terrible war cries. Narantaka, Kumbhahanu, Mahanada and Samunnata, the ministers of Prahasta, marched behind him.

Surrounded by *rakshasas* like mad elephants, he resembled the ocean-king surrounded by the dreadful monsters of the deep as he came out of the eastern gate. As he issued from the city, even as the god of death that destroys all creatures at the time of dissolution, all beings in Lanka trembled and howled at the shouts that followed the *rakshasa*-general and the roar of the armies. In the clear sky, birds flew inauspiciously round the car in flocks from left to right and rejoiced at the thought of the rich repast they would have that day of flesh and blood. Frightful jackals vomited flames and howled; meteors fell, storms blew; the planets contended with one another and grew dim; clouds roaring dreadfully showered blood on the car of Prahasta and on the *rakshasas* that went before. On the top of his banner a huge vulture sat facing the south and scratched his wings with his beak. Thereat Prahasta's face grew pale. His charioteer, of noble lineage and wonderful skill, let fall his whip by accident. The matchless radiance and lustre and spirit that Prahasta had when he started for battle waned very soon. The horses stumbled in level places. The monkey-forces saw Prahasta, renowned for strength and valour, coming against them; and they faced him with trees, mountain tops, and blocks and frightful war-cries. Both the sides were beside themselves in ardour of fight and shouted so that the quarters trembled. They were of matchless speed, of wonderful skill in warfare, intent upon slaying one another. They filled the earth and the sky with their cries of defiance and slaps on the shoulders. Thus did that black-hearted Prahasta deciding to destroy the monkey-hosts and defeat Rama and Lakshmana, make his way into the ever increasing.monkey-armies like a moth falling into a blazing flame.

CHAPTER 58

DEATH OF PRAHASTA

SEEING Prahasta the valiant hero coming forth to fight, Rama turned with smile, to Vibhishana and said, "Lo! there comes towards us a *rakshasa* with a huge body and countless forces behind him. Who is that hero?" (The sight of a powerful enemy brought forth joy and a smile from Rama. Prahasta came out of the eastern gate. But Rama stood at the northern gate. How was he able to know what was happening at the distance of many *yojanas?* Trusted messengers brought him news and he speaks as if he had direct knowledge). And to him replied Vibhishana, "Lord! this is the commander of the forces of Ravana; he is known as Prahasta and is the leader of one-third of the troops in Lanka, strong, expert in weapons, undaunted in battle and the hero of a hundred fights."

Then roaring fearfully like thunder in summer and followed by *rakshasas* like mountains of collyrium, Prahasta came out to battle with bulk and shape that struck terror into the hearts of his foes. And his valour was equal to his strength. In the flush of their strength and anger, the monkeys roared aloud. The *rakshasas* ran towards the monkeys, intent on killing them brandishing swords, tridents, spears, bars, bows, and other weapons of war. The monkey-lords, armed with trees in fruit and flower and long and broad boulders, sprang at their foes. Both sides kept up an incessant shower of stones and arrows and fought dreadfuly at close quarters. Countless monkey-warriors met their death at the hands of the *rakshasas*. Countless *rakshasa*-warriors were slain by the *vanaras*. Some were pierced by tridents; some were sawn by wheels; some were cloven by axes; some fell down dead; some died of cloven hearts; some were strung on strings of arrows and perished; some cut by broad swords, writhed on the ground and passed away; some had their sides ripped open by tridents and met their death. The monkeys, mad with fury, ground to dust crowds of *rakshasas* with trees and mountain peaks. Struck with fists and palms, hard like adamant, their teeth broken and eyeballs forced out, the *rakshasas* vomited blood. Some cried with agony; some roared like lions in joy; thus there was one mighty defeaning uproar. The heroes on both sides showed all their skill. Rolling their eyes fiercely without a touch of fear, they performed deeds of valour with relentless fury.

Narantaka, Kumbhahanu, Mahanada and Samunnata, the ministers of Prahasta, sprang at their enemies on all sides and slew them. Thereat Dvivida killed Narantaka with a mountain top; Durmukha, Samunnata with a huge tree. Jambavan smashed Mahanada with a big block of stone; and Tara sent Kumbhahanu to his death with a blow from a lofty tree. Prahasta could not bear this sight and he destroyed with his arrows the monkeys in crowds. The two armies joined hands and moved to and fro and staggered like a huge whirlpool in the ocean. There arose a frightful sound like waters being lashed by a storm. Prahasta, in his rage, kept up a ceaseless downpour of arrows and displayed his wonderful skill in fight. That field of battle was frightful to see, covered as it was with the mountainous heaps of *rakshasas* and monkeys slain in fight. The ground was hid beneath a torrent of blood and looked like a large forest hid by Palasa flowers in summer.

That battle-ground was a large river; the two ridges of slain warriors were its banks; the broken weapons were the trees; blood was the water that flowed in it. The Lord Yama, that gathered to himself the lives of the combatants, was the ocean; the flesh on either side of the heart was the mire; the protruding entrails were the moss. Severed heads and limbs were the fish; hands, legs and trunks were the lender green grass on the banks; vultures and eagles were the swans and water ducks; the fat was the foam, the cries of the wounded were the noise of falling waters; cowards dare not cross it. A river bright with swans, and water fowls at the end of the rains, the monkeys and the *rakshasas* leapt over it, waded through it and swam in it, like mad elephants entering a lovely lotus pool, troubling its waters and crossing to the other bank covered with lotus stalks; the warriors were bathed in blood and came out of the river red of hue.

Nila, the commander of the monkey-forces, beheld Prahasta destroying the monkey-troops by the arrowy shower he kept up from his car. Like a fierce wind driving the cloud-banks before it, Nila drove the *rakshasas* in panic before him. But Prahasta guided his car, shining like the noonday sun, to where he was. Best of archers, he bent his bow, strung it, twanged it, and riddled Nila with countless shafts. They passed through his body and entered the earth, hissing like infuriated serpents. Pierced by arrows that burned like flames, Nila tore up a lofty tree and hit with it the *rakshasa* rushing towards him. Prahasta roared in fury and kept up his arrowy downpour upon the monkey hero. Unable to stop it, Nila closed his eyes and stood there motionless like a huge bull suddenly caught in an autumnal shower. Then he plucked off a huge sal tree and struck down the swift horses yoked to the car of Prahasta, broke his bow and roared in triumph. Prahasta, his horses dead and his bow broken, jumped on the ground and snatched a bar of iron. Both of them were commanders of troops; mighty in speed; implacable in hatred; and like elephantss in rut they bit and tore each other's, their bodies drenched with blood. They were strong and agile like lions and tigers; never till then had either known defeat; famous warriors both who had never retraced a step in battle; each tried to defeat the other and win boundless fame. They were like the god Indra and the *asura* Vritra. With all his strength Prahasta struck Nila on the forehead with the iron bar. Nila covered with blood, tore up a mighty tree and struck Prahasta with it on the chest. Prahasta made light of it and sprang upon the monkey-hero with the huge bar in his hand. Then Nila took a huge boulder and brought it down with force and speed upon Prahasta's head. It was smashed to pulp. Bereft of sense, he fell on the earth lifeless, and lustreless, like a large tree uprooted. And from his body and head there flowed torrents of blood like cataracts down a mountain slope.

At the sight of their commander slain by Nila, the *rakshasa*-forces, till then undaunted, lost spirit and joy. They were dazed and could not stand.

CHAPTER 59

RAMA SHATTERS THE CROWN OF RAVANA

WHEN the general Prahasta was thus slain by the commander of the monkey-hosts, the *rakshasa*-troops endowed with the speed of the raging seas and armed with every kind of dreadful weapon, were routed and, seeking the presence of Ravana, told him how Prahasta had met his death at the hands of the son of Agni. Never even in his wildest dreams had Ravana thought that such a thing could happen. Hence, he turned to the *rakshasa*- warriors that stood round him like the heavenly heroes round the throne of Indra, and cried, "Look! Our commander Prahasta is no ordinary warrior. He could make Indra cry for mercy. And now he and his countless *rakshasa*-troops lie slain by these wretched monkeys. Here is a lesson for us; we should not underrate the foe. I shall myself go out to fight and come back victorious, consuming in the fire of my arrows Rama, and Lakshmana and their monkey-hosts, even as a forest fire burns down the trees." And he ascended his car that blazed like a flame. Horses of the noblest breed were yoked to it; its splendour illumined all the quarters. When the Lord of the *rakshasas* went out to battle, the sound of conches, drums, kettle-drums, war-drums, tom-toms and other martial instruments, the slaps of warriors on their shoulders, their defiant cries and shouts and the solemn music of purifactory religious chants filled the atmosphere. The Lord of Lanka went forth crowned with the blessings of elders and the praises of his subjects. Surrounded by *rakshasa*-braves, with bodies hard like mountains, able to change at will their forms like cloud-banks, their eyes blazing like fierce flames, he resembled the Lord Rudra, the leader of *asuras,* surrounded by his hosts of *bhutas* (elementals). (The *Maitrayaniya Upanishad* tells us that the *tamasa* or the dark aspect of the Almighty is known as Rudra; hence it follows that he is the Lord of the *asuras*).

Then Ravana, the shining one, came out of the city and found the monkey-forces armed with trees and mountains, dreadful to look at and roaring like the ocean and the rain-clouds. At the sight of the *rakshasa*-forces marching furiously against him, Rama's arms grew longer with ardour for battle; the goddess of heroism shone forth from him. As he stood there in the midst of the boundless armies, his eye fell on Vibhishana who knew the strength and weakness of the *rakshasa*-warriors and he said, "Oh! brother of Ravana, this vast *rakshasa*-host — who leads it? It is furnished with banners, flags, bows, tridents, spears and other weapons of war; elephants, huge like mountains, and fearless warriors grace it. It seems impossible to rout it. Vibhishana, brave like Indra, then described in detail the names and valour of the *rakshasa*-heroes. "See you there a warrior with a huge body and his face red like the rising sun? He is seated on the shoulders of that rutting elephant and by the weight of his body causes his mount to tremble. He is AKAMPANA, the son of Ravana.

And that other warrior there, whose car flies the lion-banner and who whirls his mighty bow aloft like the rainbow in the sky, out of the sheer strength of his arm, he is none other than INDRAJIT, the first born son of Ravana. His strength is that of an elephant in rut; his front teeth are deformed and project dreadfully; thanks to the boons he has won from Brahma, he can make himself invisible at will.

That warrior there, whose body is huge like the mountains Vindhya, Mahendra and Astagiri (the mountain of sunset) — he is ATIKAYA. He twirls between his fingers his enormous bow and he comes towards us in a car drawn by a thousand horses. Though he has not the magic art of Indrajit, he is a more mighty hero.

And look there where that other *rakshasa* stands with eyes red like the rising sun; he rides a noble elephant and his dreadful roaring harmonises with the sounds of the bells on his mount; he is MAHODARA.

Yonder comes PISACHA, mounted on a horse adorned with priceless ornaments and trappings; he whirls aloft a spear blazing with splendour. Mark his course that shines like a mountain covered with clouds at sunset and his speed like rolling thunder.

Again, cast your eyes upon another renowned warrior that stands there, TRISIRAS by name. He is mounted upon a bull that looks like a mountain on feet and in his hand shines a trident with sharp points, blinding like lightning and swifter than the thunderbolt.

And there comes KUMBHA like a huge cloud in shape; his chest is broad and high and hard; there is a serpent on his banner and he waves aloft his bow, eager for the battle.

NIKUMBHA is there, armed with an iron-bound rod, inlaid with gold and gems and emitting fire and smoke. The most prominent among the *rakshasa*- hosts, he does the most dreadful deeds.

NARANTAKA drives towards us with lightning speed in his car shining like a flaming fire and furnished with bow, sword, arrows and other weapons of war and with a fine banner. Finding none to stand up to him to fight, he vents his strength by battling with the mountains.

And last there comes one who has curbed the pride and strength of the gods themselves. Round him crowd elementals with rolling eyes and faces like tigers, camels, serpents, stags, horses and other dreadful shapes. Above his head is held a large moon-like white umbrella with delicate wires. Seated beneath it is the ruler of the countless millions of *rakshasas,* like Rudra surrounded by his elementals. His face is lit up with the lustre of his noble crown and ear-rings; his body is huge like the Himalayas or the Vindhyas. He is the Lord of Lanka who has vanquished Indra, Yama and the other regents of the quarters. Behold him in his radiance like the blazing sun."

Hearing this, Rama said, "Vibhishana, what brilliance! Ravana, the king of the *rakshasas,* is glorious to behold; one's eyes are blinded as they gaze at his, even as they are by the sun in his noonday splendour. I see that his body is enveloped in lustre. I have never seen such splendour about the gods or *danava* warriors. Every one in his ranks is of mountainous bulk; mountains are his missiles; with keen weapons he comes towards us, surrounded by his chosen warriors like Yama in the midst of his terrible elementals. It is good that this sinful wretch has come within my ken today. Till now

I have controlled within myself my anger at the abduction of Sita. Now I shall turn it upon him." Raghuvira bent his redoubtable bow, twanged it with a dreadful noise, fitted to it a most powerful arrow and, with Lakshmana by his side, waited for Ravana.

Then Ravana turned towards the *rakshasas* around him and said, "Cast off all care and guard most carefully the inner fortifications, the gates and towers of Lanka, and the quarters for the troops built on either side. If our foe should come to know that you are here with me, he would make his way into Lanka, subdue the handful that we have left there and gain control of the city." He ordered them away and, like a huge whale that makes its way lightly through surging seas, he moved through the monkey-host.

Sugriva saw him coming to destroy the monkeys with a bright bow and arrows in his hand, like the Lord of Death with his noose of Time. And he tore up a mountain top, rushed towards the *rakshasa* and threw it at him. Ravana beheld it as it came towards him with its trees and torents, and cut it to bits with his gold-bound arrows. Hissing like a huge serpent, he chose an arrow with which to slay the king of the monkeys. It was swift like the *vajra* of Mahendra; it shone like the Lord of Fire emitting a shower of sparks around; it could destroy the universe like the Lord of Death himself. This shaft, like the *Sakti* sent by Lord Subrahmanya against the mount Krauncha, pierced Sugriva through and through. Unable to bear the agony, the monkey-king lost his senses and fell on the earth with a woeful cry. The *rakshasas* roared with joy as they saw him stretched unconscious on the ground. Gavaksha, Gavaya, Sudamshtra, Rishabha, Jyotirmukha and Nala at once sprang at Ravana increasing the bulk of their bodies and uprooting mountains for their weapons. But he foiled their strokes with keen arrows and pierced them with other shafts curiously bound in gold. They were dazed and fell upon the ground with frightful contortions of hands and feet; and Ravana hid the monkey-hosts under heaps of arrows. Struck by his shafts and unable to bear the torture, some were howling dreadfully; others whimpered under the strokes of another weapon, FEAR. Some crashed down to the earth by the mere impact of the speed of the *rakshasa*-ruler; the rangers in the wood shouted in terror since they had never before beheld such foes and weapons;

but all took refuge with Sri Rama to whom the worlds look for protection. (Surrender requires no other motive or reason than the experience of some pain or grief that cannot be put away. Time, place, fitness, strength or preparation need not be enquired into).

Raghava who knew the mystery of this doctrine and who is the only one to whom such a surrender is due, grasped his mighty bow, strung it and confronted Ravana. When a person comes to us in the grip of sorrow or danger, we are bound to give him prompt relief. Hence Raghunatha, was afraid that Lakshmana would perhaps march forth to battle without asking leave of him and he himself set out armed with bow and arrows. As Rama hastened forward to save those who looked to him for protection, Lakshmana with folded hands barred his way and addressed a *PRAYER TO HIM*. (Lakshmana, the devoted servant of Rama, shone in the glory of this service, as he folded his hands in prayer that his words might find acceptance. The service of the Lord of all is the highest reward and final fulfilment of his servants). "Brother, it is but right that you and no one else should slay this wicked wretch who dared to carry away your wife. And it is but child's play to you. But it is not seemly that you, endowed with boundless strength and prowess, should do battle with this puny *rakshasa*. Give me leave and let me slay him". (It might be asked, "Why not go and do it if you can?". Another would be, "I am the servant and you my Lord; I am a part and you the whole. For me to do anything without your leave is against my nature, as a dependant on my Master). And to him replied Rama, the hero of unfailing prowess, "Well, go if you will. Do not think lightly of your foe. Be as cautious as you keep to fight. Ravana is a mighty warrior; his prowess is wonderful. He seems to choose one weapon but in reality chooses another; he seems about to fit it to his bow, but fits another; he seems to discharge this but in fact shoots another. The fire of his wrath will consume to ashes all the beings in the three worlds. So mark well his defects and rid yourself of your own defects. Protect yourself well by your bow and eye". Lakshmana embraced his brother, circumambulated and saluted him with reverence and marched forth to fight armed with the consent of Rama. And there he found Ravana, bending his shining bow, covering and decimating the monkey-forces with his arrowy showers.

Meanwhile, Anjaneya ran up to him and cried, "How unfair! Here am I, your humble servant. How could you come out like this?". He thrust aside the flights of arrows and sprang at Ravana. He drew near his car, raised his right hand and shouted menacingly. "You and your *rakshasas* have put to rout *devas, danavas, gandharvas* and *yakshas.* But do you not know that you will meet with death at the hands of the monkeys? It was a fault to have allowed you to live so long. Look here, like a lofty tree with five branches, this my right hand will drink your life's breath". And to him replied Ravana, his eyes red with anger and laughing like thunder in his peerless prowess, "You monkey! strike quick! do not hesitate. You desire the glory of having struck Ravana in fight. Why should I deny you this? I shall gauge your strength thereby and then kill you with just a force needed and no more." But Maruti answered, "You wicked wretch! killing me can wait. It is yet to come. But it is a fact, it is not, that I slew your son Aksha?" Then Ravana, the shining one, struck the son of Vayu a terrible blow on his chest. At this Hanuman shivered again and again and then stood motionless for the space of a *muhurta.* But most intelligent as he was, he recovered courage and gave Ravana an angry blow with his fist. Ravana shivered as a lofty mountain does rock during an earthquake. Seeing this, sages, monkeys, *siddhas,* gods and *asuras* raised shouts of joy. Then Ravana, when his pain subsided a little, cried, "Well done, you monkey? I admire your prowess. You are a foe worthy of myself." But Anjaneya was sorely disappointed and cried, "I should curse my valour. You are still alive even after being struck by me. How can my valour be praised when it has not killed you? You strike me once again. Let me see. Do not boast in vain. I will despatch you to the world of Yama with my fist. Wicked fellow! You have survived because of my carelessness. You won't escape now". Ravana heard these words and his eyes turned red on account of wrath. He folded his right fist and dealt a severe blow on the chest of Maruti with all his strength. Being struck again on the chest Hanuman shook violently. Noticing the mighty Anjaneya standing confused Ravana drove his chariot towards Nila.

The mighty and valiant Ravana struck Nila at his vital points with shafts resembling dreadful serpents and caused him suffering. Nila got annoyed and held back the shafts with one hand, plucked a mountain peak with the other hand and threw it on Ravana. Hanuman who excelled in his splendour, intellect and valour, got rid of his fatigue in the meanwhile. Getting interested in the fight, he noticed Ravana fighting with Nila. With wrath he said, "O vile *rakshasa!* I am letting you off this time because you have been fighting with some other person". Ravana pierced to pieces the block of stone that was falling on him with seven sharp shafts. Nila noticed that and struck him with many flower trees plucked together with their roots. The demon-chief made them to pieces with his shafts and pierced the body of Nila with a shower of arrows. Nila remained unperturbed by the shower of arrows like a mountain, contracted his form and jumped on the tip of the banner of Ravana. Ravana became infuriated on seeing that. Nila roared. He was moving from the banner to the tip of his bow, and again to the top of his crown, Nila was quite at ease. Rama, Lakshmana and Maruti wondered at it. Ravana admired the agility and skill of the monkey; he took up a blazing magic weapon, wonderful in its might, dedicated to the Lord of Fire. The monkeys, observing that Ravana was confused by the quick movement of Nila, shouted for joy. But this only added to the confusion of Ravana who remained for a while lost in thought. Then he chose an arrow, chanted over it the charm of the Lord of Fire, turned his eyes towards Nila who sat on the top of the banner, and cried, "Monkey! with your speed and skill, you seem to take any form at will, as if by magic. Your wiles are all in vain. This arrow in my hand will drink up your life-breaths. Save yourself if you can." With this threat, he discharged the magic weapon of Agni at the head of Nila. The commander of the monkey-troops, hit in the chest by that magic missile, felt his whole body burning and sank to earth in agony. But being endowed with great lustre and by the grace of his father, the Lord of Fire, he escaped death. He fell on his knees resting on the ground.

When he saw Nila stretched senseless on the earth, Ravana was afire with the lust of battle and drove his car, rumbling like a black rain-cloud, to where Lakshmana was. He thrust aside Sugriva and others; he shone like a raging fire in the midst of the troops; he bent his bow, strung it, twanged the string till the earth trembled, and waved it over his head. Lakshmana, of matchless might, cried, "King of the *rakshasas!* these monkeys are no match for you. Come to me. Do not go elsewhere." Ravana heard his words, his lionlike roar and the terrible twang of his bow. He drew near and cried in wrath, "With confused mind and seeking your own death, you have come within my ken. Good, very good, Behold, I will cut you to pieces with my arrows and despatch you to the halls of Yama." Unperturbed by these words of Ravana, as he roared exposing his deformed white teeth, Lakshmana said, "Ruler of the *rakshasas!* the truly great do not brag. But you are the prince of wicked wretches; you trumpet your empty vaunts. Know I not your strength and fame, your valour and prowess. You are the mighty hero, are you not, who in the guise of a holy ascetic carried away Sita when she was all alone? Here I have come, bow in hand, to face you in battle. Let me see what you do now. No empty bragging, please." Ravana, infuriated, struck Lakshmana with seven keen shafts. And the latter cut them to pieces, which made the *rakshasa* madder yet. He shot other sharp arrows at Lakshmana. The prince kept up a ceaseless shower of arrows upon the *rakshasa* and cut down the arrows of Ravana with *ardhachandra, bhalla, karni* and other weapons. The Lord of Lanka admired the skill of Lakshmana and employed many new weapons against him. Lakshmana discharged again some arrows of boundless potency at the *rakshasa* with intent to slay him. They were sharp, swift and strong, like *vajra* , and bright like fire. But Ravana cut them down lightly and struck Lakshmana on his face with an arrow blazing like the fire of dissolution, a gift to him from Brahma. Then Lakshmana let fall his bow and shivered. Then recovering himself, he broke the bow of the *rakshasa*-king and hit him with three arrows. The force of its impact caused intolerable pain to the *rakshasa* and in his turn he shook dreadfully.

He came back to himself soon and finding himself with his bow riddled by the arrows of the foe and covered with blood and fat all over, the Lord of Lanka took up a mighty weapon named *Sakti* that had been given to him in the past by Brahma. The monkey-troops trembled at the sight of it. Ravana sent it, blazing like smokeless fire, at Lakshmana with the intent to slay him outright. The brother of Rama struck it with many an arrow emitting lambent flames, but nevertheless it hit Lakshmana's chest and pierced him through. The young prince, endowed with matchless might, was struck down by the SAKTI of Ravana and staggered senseless, surrounded by flames. At once Ravana sprang forward and tried to lift him up with his twenty hands.

The Himalayas, the standard of comparison for firmness and fortitude may perhaps be lifted up; for Ravana had once displaced Kailasa, a portion of it. One may uproot with one's arms the mount Mandara that was found fit to churn the ocean of milk, the most mighty of its kind; for the Lord of Lanka had defeated many times the *asuras* and *devas* that churned it. One may uproot even Meru that shines as the central jewel of all the lofty mountains of the earth, for once Lord Vayu crashed down its top and it fell into the sea that surrounds Lanka; and that Lord Vayu was mortally afraid of Ravana. It is not difficult to tear up the world, fifty *kotis* of *yojanas* in extent. For Hiranyaksha had, once before, carried away under his arms a portion of it, the earth, and he was but a previous incarnation of Kumbhakarna. It is possible to bear aloft the three worlds and the gods that rule it, for the son of Ravana had defeated the Lord of the gods and thrown him in prison. But Lakshmana, younger than Bharata who was younger than Rama, was a fourth of the essence of Mahavishnu. Ravana could not move or lift him up. With but two hands, the *rakshasa* shook Mount Kailasa, but even with his twenty hands he could not move Lakshmana. The ruler of the *rakshasa* and all his armies together could do nothing here.

Lakshmana, pierced in the heart by Ravana's Sakti, granted to him by Brahma, reminded himself of his nature as a ray of Mahavishnu that passeth thought and speech. (Since he did nothing else, there could be no other reason for his body becoming preternaturally heavy, except his reminding himself of his divine essence — Tirtha. This cannot be; it is not allowed by the words and their order. There are no facts to support the above view — Govindaraja. He thought of Mahavishnu from whom he came, to free himself from the danger that had befallen him. Otherwise, if this memory was ever with him, it would follow that he did not at any time manifest the human mind in his actions. And in that state it was impossible for him to have performed what he is credited with, like the slaying of Ravana -- Tirtha. Not so; himself being Vishnu, there is no one else to call upon to free him from danger. The heaviness of body is quite natural to him, though it might be contrary to the nature of things in the mortal world. But no one could know what Lakshmana thought at that time. Even so his acting out his part as a mortal man might have been in tune. The expression — 'beyond thought' — means that he was wet clay in the hands of those devoted to him and adamant in the hands of those that had turned their hearts away from him — Govindaraja. Ravana found it utterly impossible to move a hair on the body of Rama's brother, who was a terror to the pride of his enemies, though the *rakshasa* brought into use all his arms. Was not Lakshmana a ray of Mahavishnu that manifested itself in the mortal world?) (It might be questioned how Mahavishnu who was above time and space and without parts, could have a ray proceeding from him. His innate essence might be so, but his divine qualities as they manifest themselves in the Universe, come out in sequence and appear as rays different from one another).

Then Anjaneya, beside himself with wrath, sprang upon Ravana and gave him a punch on his chest with his clenched fist hard as adamant. The force was so terrible that the *rakshasa*-king fell kneeling on the floor on his car and shook like a leaf. Blood flowed from his eyes, ears and mouth. Dazed for a while, he lent motionless on the floor of the car. Then he swooned away. After some time he came back to himself; still he could not stand firmly on his feet. Seeing the mighty Ravana lying senseless, the sages, monkeys, gods and Indra shouted in joy. Hanuman gently lifted the body of Lakshmana, who was sore afflicted by Ravana, and placed it before Sri Rama. Lakshmana, whom Ravana and his retinue could not move at all, was easily lifted by an ordinary monkey who was friendly and devoted. (Lakshmana, even when he fainted away, retained his might and memory. This proves that, though Rama and Lakshmana appeared at times to be ignorant and helpless, this was only in consonance with the human roles they assumed on earth. It was not merely to slay Ravana that the Lord came down on earth as a man. He wanted to teach by example the duties of men to one another. Else how could he grieve at parting from Sita and Lakshmana since he was omniscient, omnipotent and the soul of bliss? — Suka). Finding that Lakshmana was unconquerable in battle, the weapon *Sakti* let him go and come back to its place in the car of Ravana. Lakshmana, reminding himself of his essential nature as a ray beyond thought and speech from Mahavishnu who could destroy all obstacles and all foes, was healed of his wounds and became as strong as before.

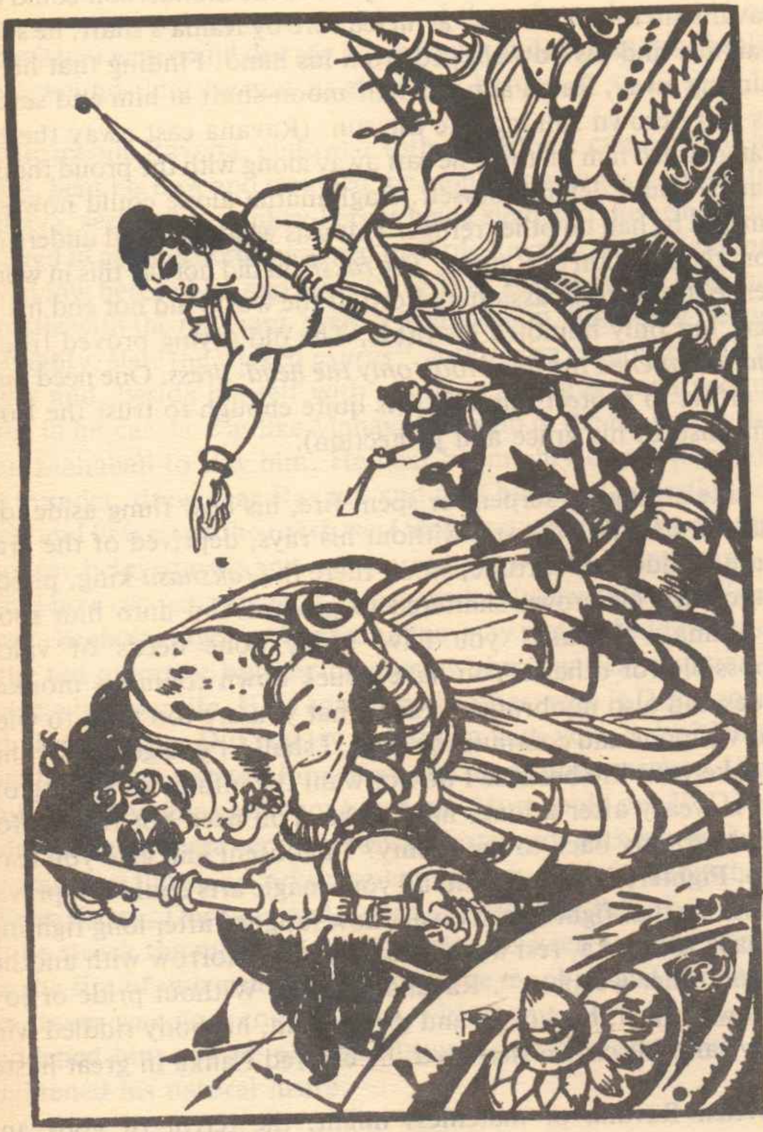
Meanwhile Ravana, endowed with splendour, came out of his swoon, bent his bow and troubled the monkeys with his keen shafts. Raghava, seeing the monkey-heroes being slain and the army being scattered in all directions, hastened towards Ravana. Then Hanuman bowed low before him and said, "Lord! be seated on my back and do battle with the *rakshasa,* even as Mahavishnu, bestriding Garuda the mighty, slew the wicked *asuras".* Raghuvira complied with his prayer and, beside himself with wrath at seeing Ravana proudly seated in his car, he was like Mahavishnu who in the far past rushed upon Mahabali to slay him. He bent his mighty bow, twanged it like thunder, drew near Ravana and told him in a majestic tone, "Best and bravest of the *rakshasas!* Stay, stay; flee not. You carried away my beloved wife and so incurred my wrath. Where can you go and how can you escape? You may seek refuge with Indra, Yama, Surya, Brahma, Agni or Sankara; you may run and hide yourself in the ten quarters; but having come within my ken, you cannot escape with your life. Here comes my brother, who is Death to you and all your men. Did you try to kill him with your *Sakti?* Do not gloat because you struck him down and made him senseless. If you think, 'Lakshmana could not touch me. How could you?" Do you know that with these very weapons, I destroyed, within a *muhurta,* the fourteen thousand *rakshasa*-heroes that dwelt in Janasthana, besides Khara, Dushana and Trisiras?" Hearing this, the ruler of Lanka struck the mighty Anjaneya with his keen arrows, flaming like the fire of universal destruction. The monkey that had struck him down was now coming back with Rama on his back. This maddened him and he pierced Maruti again and again but only heightened his natural lustre.

Seeing the son of Vayu thus wounded all over by Ravana, Rama was enraged; and with his terrible arrows he destroyed the car of Ravana, its wheels, its flags and banners, the umbrella and weapons in it, and the driver. Like Indra's thunderbolt shattering mount

Meru, the arrow shot by Raghunatha struck the broad and handsome chest of Ravana. Neither *vajra* nor the thunderbolt could hurt Ravana till then; but now, afflicted sore by Rama's shaft, he shook fearfully and his bow slipped from his hand. Finding that he was fainting away, Rama aimed a half-moon-shaft at him and severed his lofty crown shining like the sun. (Ravana cast away the bow that guarded him till then; he cast away along with the proud thought that he could defend himself. Raghunatha alone could now save him and he had no other refuge. This was what the Lord understood from the situation of Ravana. The *rakshasa* did not say this in words. Hence the all-compassionate Lord of the world did not end his life then, but only humbled his pride; The old saying proved true — *what threatened the head took only the head- dress.* One need make no effort to protect oneself; It is quite enough to trust the Lord. This ensures his grace and protection).

Like a fangless serpent or spent fire, his bow flung aside, dull and lustreless like the sun without his rays, deprived of the grace of the Goddess of fortune, stood there the *rakshasa*-king, piteous to see with his crown shattered to pieces. And unto him spoke Sri Rama, "Ravana! you have today done deeds of valour impossible for others. You have struck down countless monkey-heroes and also my brother. I fear that you are too tired to wield your weapons and continue the fight. I shall let you go now. I shall not take your life because I do not want the infamy of slaying one who is weary after a long, hard fight. You need not feel, "How shall I turn my back to the enemy?" I consent and give you leave to go. Fighter, false and foul; all your magic arts could not prevail against me that fight fair. You are now fatigued after long fighting. Go back to Lanka, rest a while and come tomorrow with another car and other weapons". Ravana listened. Without pride or joy, his bow broken, his horses and driver slain, his body riddled with arrows and his crown shattered, he entered Lanka in great haste.

When Ravana of matchless might, the terror of gods and *asuras,* retired from the field, *devas* and *danavas* rejoiced and celebrated the event. Then from Lakshmana and the monkeys Rama removed the arrows that had pierced them, caused their wounds to be healed and led his forces to another spot. When they beheld



the ten-headed Ravana, the eternal foe of the gods, put to rout, gods, *asuras,* elementals, rulers of the quarters, creatures of the deep, sages, *uragas* (gods with the heads of serpents) and the denizens of the earth, cast away their fear and exclaimed with joy, "Ravana, that monster of vice, has atlast met defeat at the hands of Rama. Now the time draws near when he shall perish and we will see our sorrows end."

CHAPTER 60

KUMBHAKARNA ROUSED FROM HIS SLEEP

RAVANA entered Lanka; he turned back again and again; for he was afraid that the arrows of Rama might chase him even there. He was shorn of his pride and his heart was troubled mightily. Like an elephant pursued by a lion, like a serpent pursued by Garuda, he was defeated by Raghuvira the mighty and was put to disgrace.

"Wonder of wonders! arrows like these, I never dreamt that there were such. They blazed like the rod of Brahma; They blinded one with their lightning splendour." This thought came upon him again and again and made his heart heavier with sorrow. He reclined on his throne of purest gold and spoke to the *rakshasas* round, "All my *tapas,* laid up with indescribable effort and trouble has now gone to waste. I who put to rout again and again the gods, the *asuras,* and Indra himself (and it was child's play to me), have now met with defeat and disgrace at the hands of a puny mortal, is it not? The terrible curse that Brahma laid upon me in the past, would it go for nothing? He said, 'Fear and danger comes to you from men." And those words have now proved true with me. I prayed of his that I should not meet my death at the hands of gods, *danavas, gandharvas, yakshas, rakshasas, pannagas,* and the others; that much and no more. But I counted not men along with them; they were too insignificant in my estimate. In the far past, Anaranya, king of the Ikshvaku race, was defeated and slain by me. His last words were "Wretch! meanest of the *rakshasa*-race! wilful and wicked! there comes in my line a mighty hero who will slay in fair fight yourself, sons, kith and kin and the entire *rakshasa*-brood." Now this Rama, the son of Dasaratha, has he taken human shape to send me to my death? When I laid violent hands on Vedavati of peerless chastity, she has laid upon me a dreadful curse. 'I will be your Fate.' And to make good her word, has she come back as Sita, the daughter of Janaka? Parvati, Nandi, Rambha, the daughter of Varuna, these four are endowed with extra-ordinary might of *tapas*; and their words will not go fruitless. (When Ravana tried to tear up the mount Kailasa, Parvati was sore afflicted with fear and cried, "Wretch! you dare to intrude upon the privacy of myself and my lord and put fear upon me. So a woman like myself will place you in fear of death." The daughter of Varuna spoken of here is probably the same as the *apsaras* Punjikasthala. These details are found in the *Uttarakanda* — Tirtha). I should ponder deeply on these points, and take measures to defeat my foe. Let all our *rakshasas* guard the inner fortifications, towers and the houses adjoining them.

Kumbhakarna, my brother is of matchless might and strength; he extinguishes the pride of the gods and the *asuras* and he is now sunk in deep sleep, through the curse of Brahma. Awake him. Sometimes he sleeps on free of care through nine or six or seven, or eight months. But, on the other hand sleep does not visit my tired eyes; every step I take is foiled; my plans go for nothing; and care and anxiety lie heavy in my heart. ("Lord, grant me that I sleep soundly through many years," was the boon that Kumbhakarna craved of Brahma without mentioning any time limits; this is what the *Uttarakanda* tells us. "But Vibhishana said to Rama, "He sleeps for six months at a stretch and wakes up but for a day. It is to be taken that the period is not less than six months). It is only some nine days ago that he was present at our counsel chamber before he went to his sleep. So it is easy for us to rouse him. What do we lack since we have such a man of might as he. He is a past master in battle. He towers like a lofty peak on the mountain of the *rakshasa*-race itself. He will slay out of hand in a moment Rama, Lakshmana and the monkeys. Like unto the army that is filled with enthusiasm and courage at the sight of the commander on the field of battle, our *rakshasa*-forces have but to catch sight of this crest-jewel of the *rakshasa*-race on the field of battle to grow in strength and courage and energy. But it is a pity he is not conscious of his own greatness and spends his intellect in small things and delights in long sleep. Else he would have achieved many a deed of fame and valour. I have been put to disgrace sorely in this dreadful battle. If Kumbhakarna were awake I have no call to be anxious. Alas! it is a pity that I have to rouse him from his sleep. What shall I do? I see no other way. I am beset by these troubles; I am put to disgrace; I have a brother like unto the king of the gods in strength and valour; yet I grieve without receiving any kind of assistance from him. So take the necessary steps to rouse him as soon as you can."

(Kumbhakarna comes out of his long sleep and attends the business during a single day. So he ought to have begun his sleep on the morrow of the day when the council met. And it was on the self same day that Vibhishana took refuge with Rama and was accepted. And from that day onwards, Rama laid himself on the bed of holy grass, seeking the assistance of the king of the waters, and that for three days in succession. Then the bridge was laid over the sea during five days. The evening before that Rama went up the mount Suvela. That night saw the duel between Sugriva and Ravana. The two forces joined in battle the next day. That very night Rama and Lakshmana were bound by the *nagapasa* and freed therefrom. Dhumraksha, Vajradamshtra and Akampana were slain. Prahasta met his death the very next day when the crown of Ravana was shattered by Rama. Thus passed away nine days according to some).

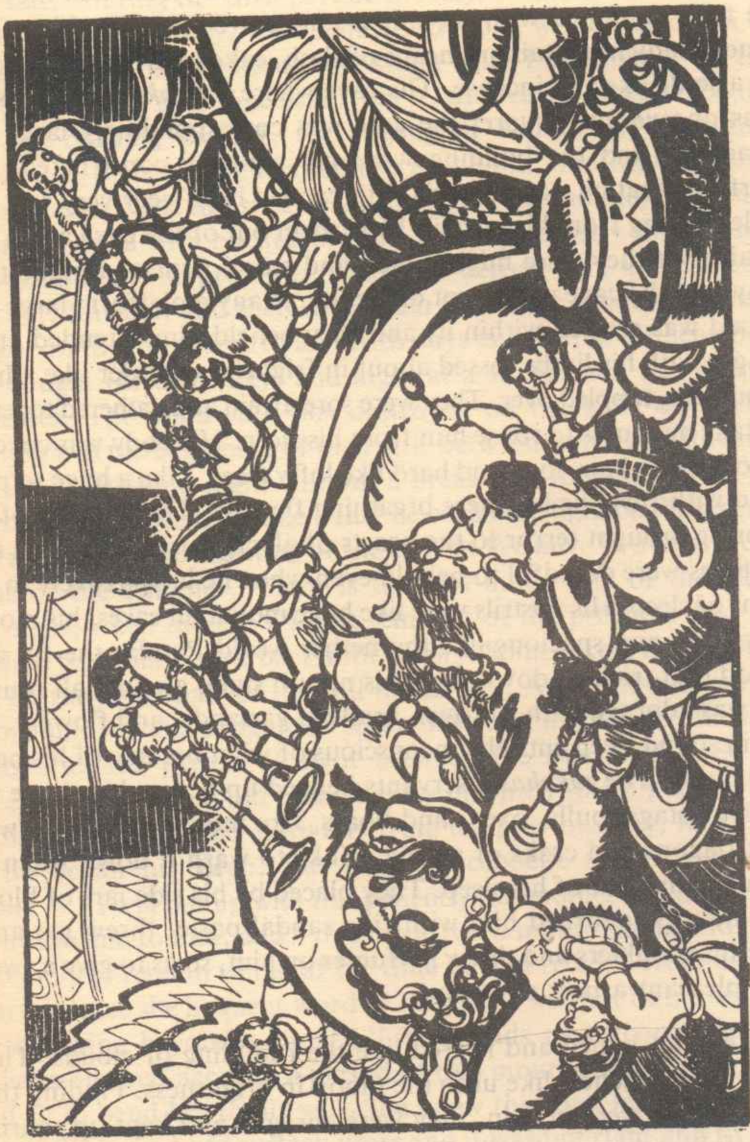
But it is not correct. We read that it was full-moon on the night that Rama went up the mount Suvela. Ravana met his death on the next new moon; so his crown ought to have been shattered on the second day of the fortnight. From that day to the full-moon day, Ravana ought to have fought on and that is not possible. So omit the day when the battle began and count nine days from the previous day; and that was the beginning of the sleep of Kumbhakarna. The council met on the day previous. In other words the Suvela mount incident falls on the full-moon; the battle began on the first day of the fortnight; nine days before that comes the seventh day of the fortnight and Kumbhakarna began his sleep then. Rama began his penance on the bed of grass. The council met on the fifth day of the fortnight; and Vibhishana left Lanka for good.

But thirteen years passed before the abduction of Sita. At the beginning of the fourteenth year, Ravana carried her away. The description of the spring in the conversation with Sampati proves this. The rainy season is described after the death of Vali and so it must have been in the month of Ashadha. Measures were taken to send out search parties for Sita in the month of Asvayuja. A long time passed over the heads of the monkeys during their stay in the cave of Svayamprabha. Maruti entered Lanka on the thirteenth day (Suddha) of the month of Phalguna. The trees in full bloom during spring attests to the correctness of this conclusion. The moon is said to rise in the sky like a bull with sharp horns and the queen of the night must have come very near her orb, on that day. Lanka was set on fire the morning next to the day when Maruti searched for her, through the city. "I should go through Lanka most carefully when this night is spent. This is proof enough. "Sita said to the monkey-hero "if you so desire, rest here for a day before you proceed." And he consoled her and prepared to go back. So Lanka was set on fire in the morning; the sea was crossed again; Maruti met his monkey friends, the honey-garden was laid in waste; and the monkeys came back to Rama. In the description of the ascent of mount Arishta, we find sunrise described as, "as if roused from happy sleep by the soft fingers of the sun's rays." The omission of a description of the sunset proves this point. That falls on the full moon day when there yet lingered somewhat of the fourteenth day and the troops marched out to battle then. "Now comes upon us the *muhurta* named Vijaya. The sun is in the centre of the sky. It is good for us that we make a start now." The monkey-host travelled night and day without taking rest; and we find that it camped the next day on the seashore. On the day that Lanka was set fire to Ravana held counsel for a while and sent them away to retire into his palace. The very next morning Vibhishana gave healthy advice to his brother for the second time. Then followed the taking counsel again with Kumbhakarna and Vibhishana present therein. For the third time Kumbhakarna offered his well-meant advice. Unable to bear the cruel words of Ravana, Vibshishana sought refuge with Rama on the seashore. So we see that Rama came to the seashore the very next day after the burning of Lanka. On that day there was yet left somewhat of the full moon day in the month of Phalguna. This is the asterism Uttaraphalguni," says Chapter 4. And the monkey-forces began their march on the day of the full moon. Further, night fell and the day closed on the waters infested with dreadful monsters; and the moon rose at the beginning of night; this tells us that moon's light began early during the evening twilight itself. It was in one and the same day that the monkey-armies camped on the seashore and Vibhishana took refuge with Rama; yet they are described in order.

Rama began his vow on the sacred grass on the first day of the fortnight; and Kumbhakarna began his sleep. The bridge was laid on the seas on the fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh and the eighth days. They camped on mount Suvela that night. The sentence, "the night shone with the lamp of the full moon on mount Suvela," should be understood to mean that the mount was ablaze with lamps, torches, and lights that made it as bright as the moon in her full. It seems that the monkey-armies were furnished with lights even as they had instruments of martial music. The next day Lanka was besieged. The stanza, "When the *rakshasas* and the monkeys were fighting, the sun set and the night began that proved fatal to the monkeys," tells us that Rama and Lakshmana were bound by the *Nagapasa* and were freed therefrom. That very night, Ravana sent Dhumraksha to the battle-field enraged by the shouts of joy from the monkeys. Since there is no mention of their breaking upon them, and since we read, "the monkeys roared for very joy", we take it that they were killed that very night. Akampana fought and fell the very next day; we read, "when he started for the battle-field, the clear day was overcast with clouds and adverse wind blew fiercely, this noting the day. Then Ravana inspected the town in the forenoon. Prahasta fought and fell at about midday. We read, "The planets fought with one another and were dim of lustre."; and so some give a wrong inference from it that the battle took place at night. The planet Budha afflicted the constellation of Rohini and brought down evil and harm to all creatures; this statement informs us that many things took place during the day that are naturally invisible then. In the second day's fight, Ravana was put to disgrace and roused Kumbhakarna who marched forth to battle. We read, "during the fifth part of the day, at about sunset, sixty-seven *kotis* of monkeys were slain. And along with it the death of Kumbhakarna, the binding of Rama and Lakshmana by the *Brahmastra* and their freedom from it, the second siege of Lanka and the burning thereof, the slaying of Kumbha, Nikumbha, Yupaksha, Sonitaksha, Prajankha, Kampana, and Makaraksha. The sentence, "the sun set and the night fell, the monkeys marched towards Lanka with blazing brand", is our authority for it. Thus in two days all the prominent *rakshasa*-heroes were killed except Indrajit, Ravana, and their *mula-bala* (domestic armies). Indrajit fought on the third, fourth and fifth days and fell, as the sentence, "he fought for three days and night at a stretch and was slain," indicates. The *mula-bala* was destroyed on the sixth day. That evening was the beginning of the battle between Rama and Ravana; it went on day and night without a break and Ravana fell on the seventh day, or one may take it that he began the fight on the seventh day and fell on the morning of the eighth. We have two interpretations of the sentence. "This is the new-moon day of the black fortnight, when there is a slight remnant of the previous day. Go forth to battle and come back with victory. Some take it that Ravana fell on the latter half of the full-moon day. As to the stanza that Rama and Ravana fought for seven days and nights, we take that it signifies the period of fight between the two armies. So we conclude that we should omit the day in which Rama put Ravana to disgrace and on the ninth day from the previous day, Kumbhakarna began his sleep. But how to reconcile these two statements — "I will put up with this patiently for another two months," from Ravana to Sita; and "this is the tenth month going and only two months remain to me of the time he had fixed," from Sita to Maruti, since she has sent word to Rama, "I will not be in the land of the living beyond a month." This leads us to conclude that Ravana allowed her only a period of two months and that he only said so to bend her to his will. She knew that that month was the last of the period of fourteen years and it was but right and fit that she should not be alive for more than a month).

Thereupon, the servants of Ravana were at a loss to find means to rouse Kumbhakarna at the wrong time; they took themselves to his palace with heavy hearts. Yet they resolved to carry out the orders of Ravana and partook plentifully of flesh and bloom that they may be fully equipped with the might and power to rouse him. They made ready mountainous heaps of flesh, cakes, perfumes, garlands as also drinks and incense. The cave where the *rakshasa* lay asleep was one *yojana* square; the gate was correspondingly large and spacious; and the building was very skilfully constructed. The perfume that he was adorned with carried itself very very far. The gale rushing from his nostrils blew them out of the cave again and again; yet they were mighty men and stood firm and made their way into the cave with great difficulty. Many a platform large and broad was erected within it, and they beheld him extended at his length with his limbs tossed about in frightful disorder like a huge mountain, toppled over. They were sore afraid and gathered together to take measures to rouse him from his sleep. His body was covered all over with hair, long and hard like lofty trees. Lika a huge serpent mad with fury, he lay there breathing fiercely. The thunder of his snoring brought terror to the hearts of all creatures. His form and features were dreadful to behold even when he lay passively in the arms of sleep. His nostrils were like huge mountain caves; his mouth was large and spacious like the nether world Patala; the fat and blood that trickled down from his mouth smelt awfully all round. He was adorned with a crown, armlets, garlands, and flowers. He lay in sound sleep entirely unconscious of what became of his body and limbs. The *rakshasa-* servants heaped up before him huge the flesh of stags, bulls, oxen, and boars, like mount Meru and with vast flagons and casks of strong drinks to wash it down when he should come out of his sleep. They placed by his side jars of blood and liquors, adorned him with fine sandal paste, threw garlands over his shoulders and threw perfumes on him, so as to give a sweet and pleasant aspect all round.

Then all joined and roared like the rumbling of clouds. They blew huge conches, like unto the moon in brightness. Finding that their efforts were in vain, they were enraged and kept up roaring frightfully, without a break. They shook him, rolled him over, struck at him with open palms. The sounds of martial music (conch, drum, and tomtoms, etc.), the sounds of the servants hitting the *rakshasa* shouting like lions to rouse him spread over Lanka. Birds were sore



afraid at it and ran in all directions, seeking relief from it; yet it followed them. They flew high in the sky; yet it chased them even there. They fell down on the earth in a faint. The *rakshasa*-hero of mountainous bulk of body did not come out of his sleep for all these; the servants were mightily angry that they had nothing in return for their pains and trouble and hit him until they were tired with wooden bars, iron bars, maces, block of stone, mountain peaks and lofty trees. They hit him with their hands and fists. Yet Kumbhakarna was none the worse for it, nor was his sleep disturbed. Those *rakshasas* were no weaklings; but they could not stand before rushing breath from his nostrils. Then those servants of dreadful valour made other preparations and banded themselves in a group of ten thousand and kept up a continuous uproar on their martial instruments of music; those servants of Ravana with bodies of the hue of collyrium mountains, found that for all their shouts and roars and blows from all sides, he was none the worse and did not come out of his sleep, devised other dreadful measures to effect their purpose. Countless horses, camels and elephants were struck with rods, whips and goads and lashed to fury and driven over him. All the instruments of martial music were sounded with the utmost vehemence and force possible. Whips of iron tied to huge posts, and wooden bars were freely used on his limbs and mercilessly. The roar of it, filled the town of Lanka; and the hills and forests round it trembled in affright. But Kumbhakarna was not in the least roused from his sleep. Then they struck and sounded thousands of huge war drums with golden rods at one and the same time without taking breath. But that *rakshasa,* thanks to the curse of Brahma sunk deeper and deeper into the arms of sleep and was utterly dead to the world. Thereat the *rakshasas* were beside themselves with wrath. Some hit him with their fists; some stabbed him; some sounded huge drums; some roared until they were hoarse; some uprooted the hairs on his face; some bit at his ears; some poured countless jars of ice-cold water in his ears. But he moved not a hair-breadth through the terrible force of his sleep. Some strong men, experts in the use of sword, sticks, hit him again and again on the head, breast and hands. Huge maces covered with leather and strongly bound with ropes and spike all over were in play over him from all sides sides without rest or interval. But there was not even any touch of feeling or sensation on his body. Then as a last resource they drove thousands of huge elephants over his body.

Then and then alone there was some vestige of sensation over his body. He came out of his sleep somewhat, and thought that some vermin were crawling over him. Then the *rakshasas* took advantage of it and struck him again and again with all their might with lofty trees and mountain tops to bring him back to consciousness. But he made nothing of it and was wrath at them for rousing him from his sleep in such an unseemly hour. Then fear touched him, when he thought of the weighty reason that induced them to rouse him thus. Dreadful hunger caught him in its grip. He stretched his heads and legs and sat up. He flung out his arms long like huge serpents, hard like mountains and strong like their peaks. He opened his frightful mouth, like unto the mouth of the ocean fire Badava, and yawned dreadfully. Then his mouth like unto the dark nether world Patala, took on the look of the sun rising on the top of the mountain Meru (one Badava is a mare that has its abode in the waters of the sea — Kishkindhakanda 168).

(The mountain Savarnimeru, is mentioned here. It is only on its top that the sun can meet it. His rise thereon refers only to the countries on the northern side of it).

Kumbhakarna indulged in his yawn and woke up. Then that *rakshasa* of illimitable strength, breathed fiercely and the sound thereof was like the thunder storms that blew from lofty mountains. As he sat there, his body decked with gold and gems resembled a black cloud-bank discharging its refreshing rains at the end of summer, when lines of cranes surrounded it. His eyes cruel like blazing fires rolled fiercely all over like lambent lightnings; he was lashing himself into fury at being roused before his time. They boded danger and destruction to others like the planets Saturn and Mars. Then the *rakshasas* drew his attention to the huge heaps of food, flesh, and cakes, that were placed before him ready for his consumption. He devoured hills of flesh to calm his dreadful hunger and drank correspondingly to slake his thirst. That was not enough for him; so he drained vessels beyond count, filled with liquor, and fat. Then those servants noted that his hunger and thirst were appeased and he was satisfied and in a pleasant mood. So they came before him but slowly and with fear in their hearts, at rousing him at the wrong time. They dared not appear before him till then. Now, they threw themselves at his feet and stood round him in reverence and respect. His eyes were yet partially closed heavy with sleep. He gazed round intently and caught sight of the *rakshasas* sent by Ravana. He was surprised to find at his being roused so suddenly, since he was not used to it at any time. He accosted the *rakshasas* graciously and said, "what made you rouse me with so much trouble to you? Is our majesty well and happy? or has fear got him in its grip? You have roused me from my sleep so quickly and that makes me infer that there is some fear hanging over my brother from a foe. This very moment I will free him from it. I will thrash down Mahendra from his lofty seat. I will destroy the Fire god beyond recognition. My brother has some weighty reasons for thus rousing me from my pleasant slumbers. So let me have the truth of it."

Thus did Kumbhakarna demand of them reasons with eyes red with wrath. Then Yupaksha, the minister, joined palms of reverence over his head and spoke humbly, "Lord! There is no fear to you from the gods or the *asuras*. Puny mortals that we passed over as insignificant have now worked great evil to us. *Daityas,* and *danavas* have never troubled us thus; nor were we so much afraid of them as now. Monkeys of mountainous bulk have laid siege to Lanka and the very air itself finds it impossible to pass through them. Raghuvira causes us to tremble with fear, even he who is wroth at us for having carried away Sita. Once before a puny monkey set on fire our capital that none dared to set fire, and reduce it to ashes. It destroyed Aksha, the prince and other heroes with their armies. Our ruler of Lanka, the terror of the worlds, and the sole monarch of our race, has been put to shame in battle by Rama. His car was shattered, the horses were killed and their driver too; his bow was broken in his hand and his armour cloven on his body. His crown was shattered to bits and he escaped with his life. He might be the great grand-son of the Lord Brahma; but what matters it to Raghuvira who is invested with the splendour and brilliance of millions of sons. The gods, the *daityas,* the *danavas,* afflicted us not so much. Our Majesty escaped with his life from the battlefield and it is a source of great wonder to us.

At the news of the defeat of his brother in battle, Kumbhakarna rolled his eyes around fiercely with wrath and like the rumbling of huge cloud-banks cried, "Hear, you, Yupaksha! I will not meet my brother before I have wiped out from existence, Rama and Lakshmana and the entire monkey-hosts. I will give a feast sumptuous to all the *rakshasas* of Lanka over the flesh of monkeys. I reserve for myself the blood of Rama and Lakshmana and their flesh. Thereat Mahodara, the *rakshasa*-hero noted with pleasure that the cruel nature of Kumbhakarna took a keener edge through pride and wrath. He joined his palms in reverence and said, "Lord, Get at the desire of His Majesty; ponder deeply over the pros and cons of it and deal with the foes as you will." Kumbhakarna assented to it and started to go to the council-hall of Ravana. Then *rakshasas* adorned him with garments, ornaments, sandal paste, flowers and garlands. Some went in advance to Ravana and cried, "Your Majesty! your brother Kumbhakarna has been roused from his sleep; he has appeased his hunger and thirst, and is on his way here to wait upon you." Ravana was mightily pleased thereat and replied, "I too am very eager to meet him. Let him be brought here with the honour and respect due to him." They went back to Kumbhakarna and said, "Lord, the ruler of the *rakshasa*-world desires to meet you. Proceed there and bring peace and happiness to his heart."

He accepted the invitation of his brother that was almost a command with him. He came down from his bed, washed his face and ordered the servants to bring him rare drinks that will add vigour and strength to his naturally rare constitution. They placed before him vessels filled with various kinds of rare and wonderful liquors. He drank two thousand of them and it had some slight effect on him. His strength and splendour increased thereby and he was glad of heart. He gave one the idea of Yama who took upon himself to destroy all creation on the day of dissolution. He took his way on foot to the palace of Ravana, followed by bands of *rakshasas.* The earth trembled in affright being unable to bear his weight. Like unto the sun irradiating the earth with his rays, he walked along the high road illuminating the space around. The folded palms of reverence of the subjects formed the garlands thrown over his shoulders; and he entered the palace of the Lord of the *rakshasas,* like Mahendra entering the audience- hall of Brahma. As he walked along the royal road, the monkey-hosts camped round Lanka cried, "Like unto a huge mountain, scraping the sky above and causing the earth to quake with his steps — who is this huge monster?"; dire fear filled their hearts thereat. Some of them took shelter with Raghuvira to whom all beings look for protection and safety. Some fell down utterly confused. Some ran here and there to hide themselves; some sat themselves demented as it were with fear. Adorned with a crown set with gems and huge as a lofty mountain peak, he came along as if he would invade the orbit of the sun with his splendour. At that wondrous sight the monkey-hosts were utterly dispirited with fear and ran here and there, to hide themselves.

CHAPTER 61

THE ANTECEDENTS OF KUMBHAKARNA

AT the sight of the monkeys, fleeing from the battle-field, in affright, Rama grasped his bow and cast his eyes around to know what caused this sudden panic, and beheld Kumbhakarna coming along. His huge body was adorned with priceless crown that made him look like the mount Meru, illumined with the Sun. He looked like Mahavishnu that covered the worlds three in number with his three steps when he came forth as Trivikrama. He was adorned with garlands of gold, armlets, ear rings, that they lay upon his body like lightning over rain-charged cloud-banks. He was like an axle on which were fixed the two wheels of the earth and the sky; for he touched both. When that wondrous form drew near, the monkey-hosts fled in fear and the *rakshasas* roared like lions with joy and enthusiasm. Rama was surprised thereat and said to Vibhishana, "Lo! there comes towards us a huge being like unto a huge mountain and takes its way along the streets of Lanka. His tawny eyes resemble Mars and Saturn so cruel is his look as it rolls about terribly. A mighty crown rests on his head and he shines as if he were a lofty banner raised upon the earth to glorify it. Who is this warrior moving about like masses of clouds, lighted with lightnings? I see no other in Lanka like him. Our monkeys flee for shelter at the sight of this monster. Who is he? *Rakshasa* or *asura.*? I have never set my eyes till now on such a creature."

And to him replied, Vibhishana most wise and intelligent. "Lord, this is the famous warrior who defeated in battle Yama and Indra. He is the son of the Maharshi Visravas and the brother of Ravana; they call him Kumbhakarna. There is no *rakshasa* like unto him in stature. Countless are the *devas, danavas, yakshas, bhujangas, rakshasas, gandharvas, vidyadharas, kinnaras,* and *pisachas,* that have been defeated by him in the battle. Frightful of look, he takes his place on the battle-field armed with trident like Yama himself. The very gods dare not raise their eyes to him then. They swooned away in affright, taking him for the Lord of Time himself. Ravana and the other *rakshasas* derive their might from the boons granted to them; but this one is naturally endowed with boundless strength and splendour. Hunger afflicted him sorely as soon as he was born; and he began to eat thousands of the creatures that he saw around him. All creation trembled with fear and took refuge with Indra and complained to him sorely knowing not what to do. The king of the gods was mightily wroth and struck him with his keen *vajra.* But Kumbhakarna paid no heed to it and roared in fury so that his body quaked with it. The earth and the creatures thereon frightened to death before at his sight trembled with terror even more pitiably. Then the *rakshasa* in his mad fury plucked out one of the tusks of Iravata, the elephant that Indra rode on and hit the ruler of the gods with it, on his chest. Indra was sorely afflicted and could not stand it and his anger blazed forth. Gods, Brahmarshis, *danavas,* and the creatures on the face of the earth, placed before them, Indra and sought the presence of Lord Brahma himself and laid before him the wickedness of Kumbhakarna, his destroying the creatures without count; his cruelty afflicting the gods. They told him how he had laid waste the sacred lodges of the *rishis* and laid violent hands on women. "Lord, if he is allowed thus to work his will on the creatures in the worlds it needs no saying that they will be untenanted and empty. The grand sire sent for the son of the Visravas and beheld him for the first time. He himself was sorely beset with fear. Then he called him to the side, spoke to him kindly and secured an influence over him, when he said, "Boy! Did my grandson beget you to compass the destruction of all the worlds I have created. So from this moment, you fall lifeless like a log."

Then Kumbhakarna fell down before him, bereft of consciousness. Thereat Ravana was sorely troubled at heart and said, "Lord, you reared a mighty tree and now you seek to cut it down when it bears fruit; is this just? The protector of all beings! it becomes you not to curse this great grandson of yours. But your word comes true; and this my brother will sleep on endlessly. So I pray you in the beginning and the end of it." Then said to him Brahma, "then he will sleep on for six months at a time and keeps awake but for a day." So this mighty warrior is sorely afflicted with insatiable hunger on that one day, roams about with his mouth gaping wide like the nether world Patala. His anger and wrath makes him look like the Lord of Death; and he devours all the creatures that he comes across. Ravana, put to shame by you, and afraid of your valour and prowess, has roused Kumbhakarna from his sleep and very soon this *rakshasa* will march out from the palace and eat up the monkey-hosts past count. Then he clean loses control over himself with the madness of anger upon him. Our monkeys flee in terror at the sight of him. I do not know how they could be brought to face him on the field of battle. So let somebody tell them that this is a huge machine worked and moved by rare engines. Then they will not be so much in terror of him" ("Lord, I have it in me that I should sleep for a very long period, undisturbed, I pray you accept my humble petition). And to the request of Kumbhakarna, Lord Brahma replied, "be it so". And he got thereby his long spell of sleep as the result of his dreadful *tapas*. But this even ought to have happened long after, since a man lying like a log cannot perform *tapas* and be granted boon thereby).

Then Rama sent forth Nila the general and said, "Array our forces and invade and hold the walls, the road, and the fortifications. The other mountain peaks, trees, and blocks of stone. All our monkeys should be ready to give battle armed with sword, shield and other weapons." Nila passed the orders on to his troops. Gavaksha, Sarabha, Hanuman, Angada and the other monkey-heroes rooted up lofty mountain tops and blocked the gates of Lanka. The monkeys and their leaders were filled with enthusiasm and courage at the words of Rama, and hit with huge trees the *rakshasas* that guarded the outer fortifications of Lanka. Like unto black storm-clouds gathering round a huge mountain, did those fierce monkey-troops take their place round Lanka armed with huge blocks of stone.

CHAPTER 62

RAVANA CALMS DOWN KUMBHAKARNA

KUMBHAKARNA, the best and the bravest of the *rakshasas* was not free from completely the influence of sleep from which he was so rudely roused and so untimely; the countless draughts of liquor he had taken but increased his pride and haughtiness; and he took his way along the royal road rich in everything rare and priceless. Thousands of *rakshasas* came after him; invincible by his foes, he was covered with the clouds of flowers showered upon him by the citizens on his way. He came to where was built the palace of the ruler of the *rakshasas,* resplendent with garlands and windows of gold and shining like another Sun in the sky. Like unto the lord of the day disappearing into the cloud-banks, Kumbhakarna entered the palace and proceeded to the hall of audience and beheld Ravana, as he reclined on his gem-encrusted throne, even as Indra beholds the grandsire in his seat of the lotus in the world of Brahma. The earth quaked in terror as Kumbhakarna walked along with his *rakshasa* -heroes around him. He passed many a suite of apartments and beheld his brother seated in the Pushpaka car with a faded look and heavy heart. Ravana saw him coming and rose in eagerness; for his heart was glad. Kumbhakarna saluted him and touched his feet and said, "What are your Majesty's orders? The ruler of Lanka raised him and clasped him to his breast fondly, enquired after his health, smelt the crown of his head and made him take his seat on a priceless throne. Kumbhakarna of boundless strength and prowess was not yet appeased in his anger by those marks of honour. His eyes blazed like fire, as he said, "Your Majesty! What might be the reason of your having roused me from my sleep? I am honoured that I am something in your eyes. Who is there that has dared to bring fear to your doors? Who is it that passes from the land of the living to the land of the corpses? Ravana found that his brother was out of temper and said to himself, He shares my wheel and woe; rather he ought to do so. Now, he is in a bad mood at being roused before his time. Sleep is dearer to him than my wheel.'' That thought roused him anger a bit in turn and he replied,'' It is nine days, since you began your sleep. Clasped in the arms of slumber you are utterly dead to the concerns of this world. You know not the fear that has come to us through Rama. This Rama, the son of Dasaratha, who trembled at the very sight of us has secured the alliance of Sugriva, the lord of the monkeys that feed upon roots and fruits and leap from tree to tree in the forest. He has thrown a bridge over the sea and has passed to Lanka with his armies and takes means to wipe us out all from the face of the earth. Behold, the monkeys have invaded like a billowy sea the groves, the gardens, the glades, the forests, and the mountains, around our town. Our famous heroes have fallen a prey to those monkeys. But I see no means of slaying my enemies in battle. This is the fear that lies at my doors now. Even as the Maharshi Agastya drank through his spiritual might, the boundless ocean, I trust you to destroy this ocean of monkeys through your valour and save Lanka. This is why I roused you from sleep. Our capital has in it only boys and old men. All its magnificence and splendour are a thing of the past. I trust to you and to you alone to save us. You should do this for me, as coming into the world together with me. Brother of mine, Death of your foes! have I ever asked of you anything like this till now? Is there a bound to my love, friendship and admiration for you? Do I not know how you again and again put to rout the gods and the *asuras* in battle, so that they fled in mad terror? The worlds hold none who can stand by you in strength, courage and valour. Take upon yourself your dreadful valour; and like a terrible storm scattering the winds in autumn wipe off from the face of the earth this monkey-hosts. Take from me the heavy load of anxiety and bring peace and happiness to cool my burning heart. I know the love you bear for me. I know the love you bear towards battle. I trust to you to behave as befits you.

CHAPTER 63

KUMBHAKARNA COUNSELS RAVANA

KUMBHAKARNA listened to the words of Ravana the lord of the countless millions of the *rakshasas* and the famed ruler of Lanka; yet like a helpless wight, he wailed out of the heaviness that sat upon him. His brother was naturally impelled to burst in a thunderous laughter as he said to himself, "There yet remain surprises for me like this." But he hastened to reply, "Brother of mine! when we met here last time in council I gave it as my decided opinion that danger is near you than you think; and that very same thing has now come about. You paid no heed to the well-meant advice of those that seek your well-being; and this is what you reap out of it. Like unto a worker of dreadful evil who falls into the lowest and most dreadful of hells, you carried away by force lady Sita; and the result of that sin has found you out very quickly. You acted then solely under the impulse of your boundless strength. Your intellect was under a cloud; you stopped not to consider whether that step would do us good, or evil; you did not take into consideration the evils that might flow from it. One should ponder deeply before he begins a thing, on the good and evil aspects of it, and on the good or evil that might flow from it to ourselves. If on the other hand you do things against the natural order setting the before and the after in wrong places he knows not the science of polity and what militates against it. You have acted thus against natural order of things. Before you thought of carrying away Sita you ought to have taken deep counsel with your ministers and alone, on the good, the sorrow, the benefit, and the loss of the act. And it is only then that you should give your thought the phase of action. You carried her away by force and have now met us in counsel.

Let this be; you should slay outright and first before everything Rama and Lakshmana that could come against you; and then alone you should think of bringing away Sita. But you carried her away first and now seek measures to slay Rama and Lakshmana and acts that are highly fruitful if performed in consequence with time and place; on the other hand if performed at the wrong time and place, they not only destroyed the high efficacy of it, but bring home very great danger. Like unto offerings to the gods in vessels not purified by the chant of holy *mantras,* these bring to you only results of an undesirable kind. A king should take deep and careful counsel with his ministers upon any measure he desires to take. It is excellent to march forth against the foe when defeat is certain to him and victory is unequivocally certain to us. It is middling to march forth against the foe when he is equal to you in strength. It is utterly ridiculous and low to march against the enemy when defeat is certain to himself and victory is equally certain to the foe. One should carefully secure to himself the following five priceless measures. He should reflect deeply on the above three methods of act; He should canvass the means of the right beginning of things; he should furnish himself with the necessary men and materials, he should march forth with due consideration to time and place; he should remove from his path all obstacles; and lastly he should secure victory in the undertaking. (These are otherwise known as place, time, self, materials, and results). The king should take counsel with his ministers as laid down in the rules of government; and he reaps the golden harvest of kingly polity to the utmost if he follows these instructions.

Dharma should be taken in hand in the morning (The best definition of this word is : Everything that conduces to the attainment as the next step in evolution). The day should be devoted to the pursuit of *artha* (material prosperity). The evening and the night form the fittest occasion for the enjoyment of life and its pleasures. Or one may pursue the first two in the morning, the second and the first in the noon and the third and the second in the evening. But he comes under the lowest grade of humanity who devotes all his time to the indulgence of pleasures of life to the exclusion of the others ends. A king to make his learning and studies fruitful should choose the very best of the above aims of life; he should also decide on the separate and individual pursuit of them; and last, but not the least should put into practice what he has heard and studied on. (You have turned your back upon *dharma* the best and the noblest of the above and have attached yourself solely and wholly to the pleasures of the senses. It is a sheer waste of time and energy, your sitting at the feet of the learned and the wise to listen to the science of government; it is like a man crying himself, hoarse against the raging billows of the ocean). One should avoid indulgence and pleasures out of season; even so one should put into action his valour and prowess at the right time. One should seek the alliance of his foes at the right time; and he should sow dissensions and quarrels in his camp by lavish distribution of money and honours. He should speak as befits the individual position of men. He should bring enmity between them and their kith and kin. He should march against his foe with due consideration to place and time. So he should pursue the above aims either singly or in groups. He should acquaint himself thoroughly with everything that goes to place obstacles in his way; he should so manage that he has on his side everything that goes to further the pursuit and attainment of them. He should also take deep counsel with his ministers on these points; and last he should live out the above keeping perfect control over his senses and mind; and such a ruler never comes to evil. He reaps the highest good possible who ever acts after pondering deeply over the measures that are consonant with his well-being and also upon the obstacles thereto; and this with the ministers who have grown grey in the science and practice of kingly polity. (You have not done so; and you now reap the results in trouble and danger).

One should seek to know the teachings of political science through expert teachers; but there are some who do not follow the above rule and yet go about as beasts in human form. They know nothing in this world except food and drink and sleep. Witless rulers take them into their counsel to discuss affairs of state. Then they advise the king through bare pride and haughtiness with nothing of intellect or skill to back them. They do not decide a point after taking into consideration the gains and otherwise or the dangers and the means to avoid them. The king who would seek his own good should never follow the counsel dangerous in the extreme of those ministers who have no such acquaintance with science or art. He should thoroughly test such ministers who prate through conceit what appears to be conducive to his welfare but what in reality is dangerous to him; and then should remove them from his council. Such men are the most likely to spoil a scheme at the very moment of its achievement. They do not stay here. They are under the thumb of foes that know how to use the means, and take the shortest way to destroy their king by inducing him to undertake measures that would bring him evil and woe. They are drawn away from their legitimate ruler by the heavy bribes of the enemy; and you may easily find them out by what they speak; it betrays on a closer acquaintance the enemy in the guise of a friend. Verily he comes to grief and ruin who rushes into action without previous thought thereon. He takes counsel only with ministers, who are the workers of evil to him. The steps that he takes are based upon what they put him on to do; it is like the Krauncha mountains where birds pass through a cleft made in it by Skanda.

He who spots out in time the ministers that seek his destruction, and puts them away from him in self preservation, lends himself to grave dangers and loses his throne. The advice of our brother Vibhishana offered to you before is most conducive to your highest good. You may safely adopt it. The rest I leave it to the pleasure of Your Majesty.

Dasamukha knit his brows into a terrible frown and said, "I came into the world before you; I am worthy of your respect; it was I that set your feet on the path of knowledge. It being so, it becomes you not to advise me taking my place. Your advice is wasted upon me. We have now passed the stage where we should engage ourselves in councils and deliberations and kingly policy. It is upto us now to use our strength and valour. No need to discuss about the past; it matters not whether reacted without discrimination of right and wrong or through ignorance or through overweaning confidence in strength and force. It is enough we failed to act right. Let the dead past bury itself. The wise waste no grief over it. Let us look to it that what is to be done is done best. If I have acted against the canons of polity or prudence, it is upon you to rectify by your might, if your heart beats for me truly, if you are conscious, to some extent at least of your wonderful and boundless strength, if it seems to you necessary and imminent that you should face your enemies, do it so and waste no time over it. Put courage and confidence in my heart; see you not that dangers lie heavy upon my heart; my plans have gone awry; and I know not what to do. He is one of my kith and kin who does not turn his back upon the enemy; he is verily by my side. He is ever intent upon helping me to his very best. He is my best friend and he stretches out his hand to me in help, who has gone astray from the path of wisdom, through evil counsel."

Kumbhakarna noted that Ravana spoke harshly and haughtily; he saw that his brother was angry with him; so he spoke gently and slowly to conciliate him. "Mighty monarch of the *rakshasa*-world! you have grieved enough; do not give way to wrath; calm yourself. Bring back peace and serenity to your heart, blot out of your memory the unwelcome past. He who causes you this care and anxiety shall meet with his death this moment at my hands. What call have you to grieve or regret so long as I am alive and by your side. I came into the world with you; I am your truest and most loyal friend. I share with you your joys and grief, gain and loss, foul and fair weather, so I should ever give you the healthiest advice I could. The kinsmen whose heart beats for you in affection knows his duty at this moment; even so will I make short work of your enemies today on the battle-field. I will send Rama and Lakshmana in hot haste, to the halls of death and scatter to the winds the monkey-forces; behold it. The flower of valour and prowess of yourself will stand wonder-stricken at my achievements today. The head of Rama shall lie under your feet to tread upon. I hope care will take itself away from your heart. I hope that Sita will throb and quiver with agony and grief. Our *rakshasas* who have witnessed till now the death of their kith and kin and friends, will behold today with joy their enemy Rama give up his life in shameful defeat. Lanka will resound all over with the news of Rama's death at my hands. Like unto cloud-banks red with the rays of the sun, will the torrents of blood flow from the huge mountainous bulk of Sugriva. So long as you are guarded by these *rakshasa*-heroes and myself who have vowed to take the life of Rama, what danger can draw near you through him? He should pass over my body to come near, is it not? My heart entertains not the least fear that any one will slay me. So let me have your orders to march to battle this very moment; no other shall go upon this venture. Your foes shall be wiped off from the face of the earth. I care not who comes against me. Indra, Yama, Agni, Marut, Kubera, Varuna, or any other, he meets his fate in me today. The very monarch of the gods will faint away in mad terror at the sight of my huge teeth like unto mountain Meru and at the sound of my terrible roars. This too is too much. I will slay by thousands my foes with no weapon but my bare hands; then who will come within the range of my eyes who has the least care for his life? *Sakti,* mace, sword, sharp arrows, I need none of them. Indra may attack me with his terrible *vajra.* Yet I will kill him with a blow of my fist. Raghava will be knocked down first; should he survive my arrows shall drain his heart's blood. What call have you to grieve so long as I am here. Let me have your orders this very moment to root out your foes. Put away behind you any fear you have of Rama. This very day I will fight a terrible fight; Rama, Lakshmana, Sugriva, of wonderful strength, Hanuman, that burnt our capital to ashes, and slew our *rakshasa*-warriors and every monkey that comes within my ken will not live to tell the tale. You need not entertain any fear even of the Lord of the *devas;* for I will secure to you boundless and undying fame today. I care not who comes against me; not even for the Lord Brahma with his four heads. I have but to give way to my wrath; and the very gods will measure their length on the earth, in the agonies of death and senseless with fear. I will curb the pride and haughtiness of Yama. I will send down my foes to the very god of fire; I will scatter upon the earth the sun and the stars from their homes in the sky; he who holds his place as Devaraja through the careful performance of one hundred horse sacrifices shall be cruelly tortured today. I quaff most pleasantly the seven oceans in which Varuna has his abode. I will grind to fine dust the eight lordly mountains of the earth. I will cleave this earth in twain with a mighty kick. The might and valour of Kumbhakarna fresh from his long sleep will be attested to by the creatures that will form his prey today. These three worlds are enough to appease my hunger. I go forth now to slay Rama and Lakshmana and bring you the highest joy and happiness. Not one monkey shall escape my hands. Your Majesty may indulge yourself in everything that will gladden our heart; drink deep, of whatever pleases your fancy; busy yourself with the usual affairs of state; and put away grief and anxiety from you. Rama marches to the world of death this very day; and then Sita will come to your side in a moment.

CHAPTER 64

MAHODARA RIDICULES KUMBHAKARNA

MAHODRA could not brook the words of Kumbhakarna. He thought that they were the outcome of the boundless bulk, valour and strength of the prince; so he lost his temper and cried, "Kumbhakarna! coming as you are of the race of Maharshi Pulastya, famed beyond compare through the worlds, you have not yet put away from you your meanness and littleness of intellect. You speak from mere pride and haughtiness, without any touch of learning or study. You have lost your wits through insolent pride and you have lost also the ability to think aright about any subject. Our Majesty is not ignorant of the science of government and what work against his interests. But you are a witless boy; you prate out of overweaning self conceit. Our Majesty knows full well the time and place of taking counsel, the obstacles to it, the relative strength of the two sides and its growth or decrease. You have not waited upon the good and the wise; you have not sat at their feet to learn from them great truths; you place your entire trust on your prowess. A man of discrimination would never take a leaf from the book of a man of the ordinary level. Then how much more does it apply in the case of our majesty.

You say that the aims of life, *dharma,* possessions, and happiness are different in the matter of their results, different in the matter of their source; you affirm that they will produce those results unfailingly. Your intellect cannot compass their nature, nor their basic truth. The performance of vedic rites that leads a man to the world of the gods entail at the outset physical worry, fatigue, and the like. Even so such acts like the acquisition by force of what belongs to other, bring on sorrow at the end and happiness at the outset. So you are not right in your allocation of the results to the acts; nor are they inevitable; nor have we anything to support your position. Our acts compass for us heaven or hell. But we see that some special sins do bear great results. *Dharma* and possessions and whatever is opposed to them, these four bring us excellent results; sometimes these last two cause grief. So *dharma* and the like as also their opposites give us two different results. All creatures go through actions that are helpful to them here and hereafter and reap the results thereof. We have seen a man entirely devoted to pleasure and happiness, enjoy the results of good deeds. Therefore it is not just to decide that the acts enjoined by the *sastras* produce happiness, when they conform to the rules laid down in the scriptures. On the other hand acts are capable of giving every kind of result. There is no inevitable connection between acts and their results. Our majesty based his abduction of Sita on this principle; and we consented to it. We never took any step without taking deep counsel in anything relating to the foe. Kindly oblige thus by laying your finger on any particular act — You proclaim your readiness to fight singly and without any help and you based your assertion on your strength and prowess. I will prove to you that your words are but a waste of breath. The *rakshasa*-heroes that made Janasthana their home, led by Khara and Dushana, do you make them out as men of no note? Yet Rama slew them out of hand by himself within a *muhurta*. Dare you defeat that warrior of warriors, hero of heroes? The kith and kin of the *rakshasas* that fell on the field of Janasthana are yet mad with terror at the very name of Rama. Rama is the first born of king Dasaratha whose war car knows no bar to its march in all the ten quarters of the earth. He is like unto a lion enraged; there is no wiseacre, but yourself, who will go out of his way to hit a sleeping black cobra and that when it is sunk in deep sleep or in the grip of hunger. Rama is ever radiant with lustre like the very lord of day; he is unapproachable when his wrath is up. No one dares to lift his eyes up to Raghuvira who resembles the lord of death come to collect the lives of the creatures in the worlds. Our forces, all told cannot stand against him for a moment. I have my own doubts upon it. Then what can you do, all by yourself. A man whose strength is gradually waning cannot hope to achieve anything when his foe whose strength is ever waxing; his utter disregard of the foe is not the path that will lead him on to victory. Such a counsel will impel a man to act only when life is distasteful to him and when death is a most welcome friend. Ofcourse you are the pride of the *rakshasa*-world, but Rama is likewise a pride of the world of men. Why something more? Indra, Surya, and the other gods have no place by him. You have not even the right or the ability to speak of standing upto him in battle. He turned to Ravana and said, "Your Majesty" why trouble yourself with varied counsels when you have in your possession and at your easy disposal that very Sita whom ordinary efforts and measures cannot place in your hands. It comes to me to make a suggestion as to bend her to your purpose and make her come to you of her own accord. If you approve of it, I pray you put away the advice of others, and act as you think fit in that matter. I, Dvijihva, Samhradi, Kumbhakarna and Vitardana, will march forth to slay Rama — thus should a proclamation be made all through Lanka. Then we give battle to the enemy without the fort. If we win, you need not trouble yourself with any schemes or measures discussed above. If we do not win, we will pierce ourselves with the arrows bearing the name of Rama, blood streaming from our wounds; we come back shouting for very joy that we have eaten up Rama and will throw ourselves at your feet and you will honour us befittingly. Then cause a proclamation to be made all through Lanka by the beat of drums on elephants back "Rama and Lakshmana and the monkey-hosts are no more. Then make lavish presents of garments, jewels, and gems, to your servants and delight the hearts of the *rakshasa*-heroes with flowers, perfumes, garlands, meat and drink. This glad news will spread all over Lanka — "Rama is eaten up by our rakshasas." Then you take your way straight to Sita, console her, for the loss of her husband, and pray her to place her affection on you and accede to your wishes. Lord her with gold and gems and garments and wealth of every kind. This measure will bring fear and grief in the heart of Sita. It matters not that she has till now entertained no thought of love towards you. Now, she has lost her husband and there is no one to whom she could turn for help or comfort; so she will take refuge with you and you alone. When she comes to know most assuredly and definitely that he who was the object of her deepest love, is now no more, she will put away all hopes of going back to him. She will place herself at the disposal, thanks to the innate tendency of unsteadiness of women. She has been brought upon the lap of royal luxury; she is fitted to go through the life of unalloyed happiness; she has for sometime been a mark for the arrows of misfortune and misery. It is not difficult for her to decide that life and all that it holds of happiness and delight is before her only through you; so she will come to you of herself.

This is my scheme, so far as my intellect can compass. But serious and inevitable danger lies before any one who goes out to battle against Rama and comes within the range of his vision. So there is no call to invite death to our homes. Happiness, joy, delight, and everything that the heart holds dear on high is yours without stirring from your seat and without any trouble about fight or battle. We need not face the forces of our enemies; we need not entertain any fears about our lives on the battle-field. We can defeat them without the trouble of fighting him. Unparallel fame, happiness, is yours, as also the priceless treasure of Sita, the abode of all that is good, noble and auspicious — all these, are yours. (Mahodara hints that Rama and Lakshmana are sure to die the very moment when Sita has turned away her heart and placed it upon another and has become his wife).

CHAPTER 65

KUMBHAKARNA GOES OUT TO FIGHT

THEREAT, Kumbhakarna frowned at Mahodara and put him down roughly; he turned to Ravana and said, "I will wipe out the fear that has come to you through that Rama, the wicked wight; and that through his death. May you live long without the shadow of a foe to cross your path. Heroes waste not their words like spent clouds. My words shall be fully borne out by my acts. Heroes brook not the insult put upon them by others; they never brag or blow their own trumpets; they do not sing their praises, but will reveal themselves and their valour through acts, but those that are bereft of reason and calm judgement, those that are inwardly afraid of the enemy, those that are hopelessly conceited as all wise, those that are of your clan, Mahodara, to you and to ministers like you have our majesty lent his ear and has brought himself to this pass. The very word battle falls upon your ears like thunder and grips your heart with terror; then you simply echo the sentiments of your master and speak what is pleasant to him; you lend yourself unresistingly to all his purposes. Your counsel and that of your kin has impelled our majesty to carry away Sita and invite this terrible fight upon us. Alas! this Lanka, perfect in every way has for its ruler one whom it is hard to describe; dreadful indeed must have been the *karma* that it laid upon the past to win for it such a ruler. The best of friends, to all appearances, is but in secret his worst foe and destroyer. The people of Lanka are bound for ruin and destruction at the hands of such a king. Our forces have been scattered to the winds; our wealth and power have had a dire fog; and there remain but our majesty to tell the tale. Now, here do I march to battle to remedy the evil that you have brought upon us. I will make short work of our foes. No one here has any call for care or anxiety." Thus did he roar and shout in exultation and in lust of battle like serried thunder-clouds.

His words brought joy and peace and assurance to the heart. He applauded the sentiments of Kumbhakarna; he expressed his pleasure at the clever and considered words of his brother. He glanced at Mahodara and said in high glee, "Brother of mine, this fellow seems mortally afraid of Rama. Hence battle is far from his thoughts. But no one can come upon the like of you whose heart ever thirsts for the joy of a noble fight. There is nothing about fights or battles or wars that you know not; likewise you have no peer in strength, courage, and your love towards me. So I ventured to rouse you most untimely from your sleep, only to rid myself of my foes and fear. Now is the moment when the *rakshasas* that are intent upon my well- being should express their loyalty in action. Go forth to battle, armed with your trident, like unto Yama with his noose of destruction; Rama and Lakshmana and the entire monkey-hosts cannot afford you a mouthful. They might shine in the brilliance and splendour like unto the Adityas; but what does it matter to you. Why they have but to cast their eyes upon your wonderful bulk to die of cloven hearts. As for the monkeys they will hide themselves all over the earth like unto cloud-banks lashed with fierce winds and storms. Go forth unto battle, brother of mine, and come back crowned with victory." Ravana spoke thus to put fresh spirit and enthusiasm in the heart of Kumbhakarna, whose natural strength and valour were boundless. He felt himself in possession and enjoyment of the life-breaths that had passed away from his body. Full well did he know the matchless strength of body and prowess of his brother. So his face shone like the spotless moon, free from all care.

Kumbhakarna grew in bulk and strength as it were from the words of his brother and king. His heart was glad at the praise and confidence bestowed on him; so he took leave of Ravana and prepared to go forth to battle. He raised aloft his trident frightful to see, forged of black iron. It was decked with gold of the most precious kind molten and pure; it blazed like the flame of the huge fire. It was frightful to behold like the *vajra* of Indra and was heavy in proportion. It was the trident that won for him victory many a time on the field of battle, when *devas, danavas, gandharvas, yakshas,* and *kinnaras,* fell before him. It was ever adorned with red flowers and vomited cruel flames through its natural spirit of cruelty and malignity, the result of its blinding splendour. The blood and flesh of countless foes were imbedded in it. Kumbhakarna played with it lightly and cried, "Your Majesty! I go forth to battle with none by my side, my armies shall stay here. The lust of battle and the wrath of it is to be upon me today; and the monkey-hosts shall go down my throat like anything; and he roared frightfully. But Ravana intervened and said, "My dear boy, not so; march forth to battle in the midst of your armies and armed as becomes the hero like yourself. The monkeys are very intelligent creatures, very highly endowed with reason and judgement; they are bursting with enthusiasm and preseverance. Should they come upon their foe in careless moment, and all alone they will bite him to death. So go to fight with forces that might keep you away from them. Send to the halls of death every foe that seeks to stand up against the *rakshasas.*" He came down from the throne and threw round the shoulders of his brother a huge garland of gold encrusted with priceless gems. He made a further present of armlets, shoulder plates, rings, chaplets, ear pendents, and other noble ornaments; he decked him with graceful ropes of flowers, threw scents and perfumes over him and gave him leave to go and fight. Then Kumbhakarna blazed forth like unto the sacrificial fire, set with offerings and made powerful with mighty *mantras.* A waist band ran round his loins decked with rare gems like *Gomedaka* and *Indranila;* it sat upon him like the huge serpent Vasuki as it was wound about mountain Mandara when the *devas* and the *asuras* threw it in the ocean of milk to churn it to get the waters of immortality. His armour of gold made him mighty. It was proof against the weapons of the foe and shone in its splendour like lightning flashes. He gave one the appearance of a huge mountain surrounded at sunset by cloud-banks. He started towards the battle-field gracefully adorned in every way and armed with his trident. He resembled at that moment the Lord Narayana who came down as Trivikrma to measure the three worlds in three feet. He clasped his brother warmly to his breast, went round him in reverence and bowed low before him and that mightiest of the mighty of *rakshasas* took his way to the battle-field. Of boundless bulk and strength and vigour, that hero among the *rakshasas* went on his way roaring frightfully like black thunder; and Ravana sped him on his way with powerful blessings for his success.

Conch, war drum and other martial music crashed wildly. Armies of *rakshasas* followed him with weapons of rare make and power and there followed him elephants of mountainous bulk, horses fleet as the raging tornado, chariots and car warriors by thousands roaring with pride and exultation like surcharged clouds. Serpents, camels, mule, horses, lions, elephants, deer, swans, and the like were the mounts used by the *rakshasa*-heroes. Kumbhakarna, the terror of the gods and the *asuras* was clean hid under the shower of flowers rained on him by the people. A spacious white umbrella spread over his head like unto the moon in its full. He walked long as he played lightly with his sharp trident. Endowed with pride and haughtiness of no ordinary kind, the smell of blood from the field of battle but made him more haughty and furious. Infantry past count and past any chance of deafeat came after him; of frightful shape and bloodred looks of anger of hews and thews like unto mountains of black paint, they marched around him armed in every possible way and rending the air with their war cries. Some sported tridents, some short swords, some hatchets, some long spears, and clubs and bars and palm trees and these were light materials in their hands and fed their martial spirit. Kumbhakarna himself took a form that turned the hearts of his foes to water and cast their hair to stand upon end; his strength and splendour waxed illimitably, as he set out to battle. His body looked like a huge mountain; it was one hundred bow-lengths around and six hundred bow-lengths in heights. His eyes struck terror into the hearts of those that held them and were huge like unto car wheels. He walked and the earth quaked under his feet like unto a lofty mountain with its woods and forests burnt down by a conflagration. He glanced round at his *rakshasas,* opened his mouth like unto the dark underworlds, laughed in tones of thunder and cried. Behold my prowess and valour today. This monkey-host and its leader are like moths at a flame, to fall into the fire of my wrath and be reduced to ashes. These creatures that range the woods have till now, done me no harm or given me any offence. They formed a pleasing ornament to the groves, glades and gardens of Lanka. But now they have dared to besiége the town and have to pay for the music they have called. First and foremost I will send to their death Rama and Lakshmana, the head and front of all this evil, and then I will rid the earth of every vestige of the monkey-tribe. The *rakshasas* roared dreadfully out of joy at these words and the waters of the sea were sorely troubled thereby. Countless were the dreadful portents that arose on all sides when Kumbhakarna marched to battle. His keen intelligence failed not to read them right. Clouds taking the shapes and colour of asses, loomed dreadfully on high with thunder and meteor and blazing fires. Woods, mountains, oceans, and such like quivered in agony. Frightful jackals howled fearfully, emitting flames from their mouth. Birds circled in the wrong direction. Vultures and eagles fell across the path of the *rakshasa,* as if roped in garlands. Nay his right eye and arm throbbed painfully. A blazing fire-brand fell in front of him with a terrible roar. The sun grew dim; the winds blew painfully. Bound by noose of Yama, Kumbhakarna was confused of mind and did not pay any heed to those dreadful portents that caused the hair to stand on end. He walked through the city and crossed the courts and came out on the plains beyond, only to behold the monkey-host hide the earth from view like serried cloud-banks on high; the sight filled him with wonder. On the other hand the monkeys were clean dazed at the sight of the *rakshasa*-hero coming towards them like the mountain on foot; so they hid themselves wherever they could find a corner. Like unto black heavy clouds lashed by a fierce whirlwind and scattered all over, that vast monkey-host, frightful to see in itself, took to their heels, chased by fear, thereat that *rakshasa*-warrior roared in joy. It fell upon the flying monkeys like surcharged rain-clouds called to one another in tones of thunder. Even so Kumbhakarna black of hue like those very clouds and rending the air with his lion like roars, caused the best and bravest among them to fall dead or senseless where he stood like lofty monarchs of the forest uprooted by fierce gales. The mightiest of the mighty *rakshasas,* endowed with form, strength, prowess, courage, and other heroic excellences to an unparalleled degree, brandished his trident aloft and rushed forth on the battle-field to wipe his foes out of existence. The monkeys fell senseless taking it for the Lord Yama issuing forth from his abode on the day of destruction to gather unto himself, the worlds and all that they held, his rod of Time waiting upon him with the words, "What are thy orders?"

CHAPTER 66

KUMBHAKARNA IN THE BATTLE-FIELD

KUMBHAKARNA, stronger than the strongest of the sons of the earth, leapt over lightly the courts and the walls of Lanka and came out of the city like a lofty mountain peak.The waters of the sea gave back his terrible roar, millionfold intensified; bolts fell from the blue; mountains were consumed to ashes; Indra, Yama, Varuna and the other regents of the worlds on high failed woefully when they stood up against him with mortal intent and when he came against them with his frightful eyes rolling about like comets, the monkeys took to themselves on all directions. Then Angada said to Nala, Nila, Gavaksha, Kumuda and the others. "What are you at now? You have clean forgot your noble ancestry, strength, courage, prowess, and valour; you are on the grip of mad terror and like the ordinary rut of monkeys, you take to your heels; is it seemly? Friends! well, enough of it, come back. Life, is it so sweet and dear? I wonder what you keep it for unless you sacrifice it in the cause of Raghuvira. This is no *rakshasa* that you should fight with. This is but a huge machine fashioned like a *rakshasa,* sent here to frighten us, that is all. This is used at Lanka for a similar purpose; and it is upto us to grind it to powder with our strength. Come back one and all. Then the monkey-warriors took heart slowly and gathered themselves again in bands and marched forth against the enemy with trees and stones. They barred the way of Kumbhakarna like maddened elephants and hit him to their hearts content, fired by wrath. Huge mountain peaks, blocks of stone, trees with flower in bloom, were used most lavishly on him; but that *rakshasa*-hero stood still and only laughed in tones of thunder and derision at their fruitless efforts; such was his unparalleled strength. On the other hand blocks of stone and trees touched his body only to fall around him ground to dust. Like a conflagration making short work of the forests, he clean consumed with his wrath the monkeys, no mean warriors themselves. Heroes and warriors among the monkeys, beyond count fell on the earth bathed in their blood; some were clean shot for far away like lofty trees with their blood-red flowers. Some took to their heels with grim terror after them; leapt over everything that stood in their way and ran on and on afraid to cast a look behind. Some took shelter in the waters of the sea; some vanished among the clouds on high. Some were sorely handled by the mighty Kumbhakarna and ran along the bridge laid upon the waters.Bears ran up the trees; some hid themselves in deep valleys and clefts; some vanished from view among the mountains; some entered the depths of the ocean, others concealed themselves in dark caves; others lay where they fell; yet others left behind them the battle-field and all it held; yet others fell on the earth and craved for mercy; some held their breath and lay on the ground like dead. Angada beheld with such a heavy heart, the monkey-host thus put to rout and cried, "Stay, come back, let us fight to the last. You can go no where on this hearth and hide yourself to escape from him. So, come back, it is your only chance. Why should you keep your lives soiled with disgrace and shame. Monkeys whose valour knows no stress or stay, our women have but to behold you at present fleeing in mad terror with your arms and weapons flung away from you; and they will have a rare laugh at it, is it not so? Death takes no other form but this in the case of those to whom honour and fame is dear. There is none among but comes of a noble race and where would you flee, mad with terror like the ordinary monkey on his perch? Such as cast away behind them their strength and courage and take to their heels chased by fear, they are the lowest of the low, the meanest of the mean, is it not? Your brag, your boast, your proud and haughty estimate of yourself, your war cries, your slogans, your holding forth on your own self before admiring crowds where are they now? The entire creation split in utter scorn and contempt as a trembling coward, as a mankind, him who grabs fiercely at his life even when the world has put upon him shame and disgrace. I ask you but to tread on the noble path of honour and fame that your ancestors trod; cast away behind you fear and terror. We may flee for all time and through all space; but Yama not likely to strike our men from roll; but, should we resolve to lay down our lives on the battle-field with our faces turned to the foe, in grim defiance, the world of Brahma is ours, where mighty warriors, shine in glory and radiance; and that is no crown for all the sundry to wear. Should we send our enemy to his death, boundless fame is ours by right. Our life is the only price we have to pay for a seat in the halls of the glorious warriors on high. It is a trifle we have to pay while what we get in exchange is illimitable. This Kumbhakarna, would he go to where he came from, once that he has come within the range of our Raghava's eyes. As well speak of a moth that returned to tell the tale of its experience in the heart of the flame. Should we take measures to save and guard our pitiful life, driven forth from the battle-field by this *rakshasa* and we famed till now over the earth — we lose our real life, the life of fame and renown, is it not so?" But the monkeys heeded him not and his well-meant counsel and cheer. They stayed not their course, lashed by fear and clean bereft of their wits. Yet they managed to reply as they ran, "This Kumbhakarna kills us in dreadful torture, is this a time for us to stay and fight. He who fights and lives may yet see happier days; there is many a thing to his hands to eke out a kind of existence known here. He who fights and runs away with his life may yet live to fight many a battle and crown himself with glory; and in a moment they vanished from view. Then Angada tried his very best to bring cheer and courage to the hearts of monkey-warriors who took to their heels at the sight of Kumbhakarna of frightful bulk and form, his eyes blazing dreadfully with the wrath that burnt within him. He managed to calm their fears; he held before them the death of Vali at the hands of Rama; he told them of how he managed to pierce the seven lofty trees and mountains; he related unto them the wonderful achievements of Rama when he threw a bridge across the frightful seas; he discoursed unto them of the unparallel and boundless strength and prowess and valour of Ramachandra; and managed to rally the monkey-hosts as far as he could. They too took heart slowly and managed to pluck up courage and enthusiasm from the depths of despair; they obeyed the words of Angada, and returned in hot haste to fight with Kumbhakarna, come what may — Rishabha, Sarabha, Mainda, Dvivida, Dhumra, Nila, Kumuda, Gavaksha, Rambha, Tara, Panasa, and their clan. And Anjaneya marched along with them.

CHAPTER 67

DEATH OF KUMBHAKARNA

THUS did the monkeys of mountainous bulk, listen to the words of Angada; their innate courage and valour came back to them; and they were eager for a fight with the monster. They shouted their valour of deeds; they placed their hopes in their own strength and prowess; they resolved to sacrifice their lives in the cause of Rama and that most gladly; so they hemmed in Kumbhakarna on all sides with joyful cries and offered him dreadful fight. They hit him from all sides with uprooted trees and mountains. But Kumbhakarna was beside himself with wrath; he brandished his mace with frightful force and slew the monkeys in large crowds at a time and threw them forth all round. Seven hundred, eight hundred, one thousand, and thus did he crash down to the earth the monkeys at one stroke. Eight, ten, sixteen, twenty, thirty, and so on did he throw down his throat, the monkeys as he ran. Like unto the serpents that pass through the throat of Garuda, the monkeys that found a place in his stomach were past count. Then the generals did their best to allay the panic among the monkeys; they rallied back from all quarters and gathered round him with trees and rocks in their hands.

Dvivida uprooted a large mountain and sent it against Kumbhakarna like a boundless cloud-bank resting lightly upon a big hill. But it missed him and fell upon the *rakshasa*-troops around him and smashed countless horses, elephants, chariots and *rakshasas*. Once again he tore up another mountain and crashed it upon the horses and drivers of the *rakshasa* cars, causing a veritable deluge of blood to flow. On the other hand the *rakshasa*-warriors shore off the heads of the monkeys with their keen arrows and roared frightfully. The monkeys in turn retaliated with huge trees and made short work of the cars,horses, elephants, camels and soldiers.

Hanuman stood in the sky above and kept up a continual shower of mountain peaks and trees on the devoted head of Kumbhakarna. But the latter clove them with his trident, smashed them to powder,and rushed upon the monkey-hosts with his sharp weapon aloft. Maddened at the destruction of his clansmen, Maruti tore up a large mountain and barred his way and hit him frightfully. The *rakshasa* shook and staggered at the terrible impact of the blow, with his mountainous bulk of body covered with blood and fat. Then he blazed like a mountain-peak on fire, whirled his trident that shone like lightning and like unto Shanmuga who hit the mountain Krauncha of yore with his dreadful weapon *Sakti,* landed a terrific blow right on the chest of Hanuman. Anjaneya fared badly at the hands of his foe. His chest was cloven;his senses were dazed and confused; he vomited torrents of blood and roared frightfully even like the black cloud-banks on the day of dissolution. The *rakshasas* roared with joy when they saw him so beset. The monkeys lost heart and fled from the battle in mad terror.

Then Nila ordered the troops afresh, calmed them a bit and hit Kumbhakarna with a mountain peak. The foe clenched his fist and struck at the rock. So terrible was the force behind it that it crumbled into dust and fell on the earth emitting sparks of flame. Then Vrishabha, Sarabha, Nila, Gavaksha, and Gandhamadana, gathered round Kumbhakarna and hit him fiercely with mountains and trees, feet and fists. But these were to him as if someone was gently pressing his limbs to bring ease and comfort to them. In his turn he crushed Vrishabha between the arms and the monkey had no whole bone in his body. His eyes and tongue hung out; and he fell on the earth vomiting blood profusely. Kumbhakarna crashed down Sarabha with his fist, sent Nila flying with a blow of his knee; struck with his open palm at Gavaksha and kicked Gandhamadana aloft with his feet. Unable to withstand the blow, they fainted away like uprooted Kimsuka trees, and measured their length upon the earth, deluging it with their blood. Thereat thousands of monkeys gathered round Kumbhakarna and climbed upon his mountainous body; they bit and tore and hit at him. Finding them running all over his body like lofty trees on a large mountain he gathered them in his hands and like Garuda himself sending the serpents down the throat, swallowed them in his mad fury. But the monkeys that fell into the abysmal depths of his throat resembling the dark underworlds came out through his ears and nose. Thus did he make a meal of thousands of monkeys, his fury was but increased thereby and he gathered them between his arms in crowds and bands, crushed them into a shapeless mass and sent them down to find a place in his voracious maw. Covered all over with flesh, fat and blood, that ran down him wherever he went, he roamed among his *rakshasa*-troops like unto the Fire of Dissolution in the height of his wrath. Every one was in the grip of mad terror when they beheld him brandishing aloft his dreadful trident; they took him for Indra with his thunderbolt or Yama with his noose of destruction. Even as a conflagration burns down in mid-summer the dry wood of the forest, Kumbhakarna consumed to ashes the monkey-hosts with the fire of his anger. Their leaders lay in hopeless swoon; there was none to lead them; and they were howling frightfully, as they trembled and shook with fear. Crushed down by that *rakshasa* in crowds their hearts turned to water; and utterly dazed and confused, they took refuge with Raghava. Thereat Angada tore up a mountain, roared frightfully so that the hearts of the *rakshasas* that followed Kumbhakarna quaked in terror and hit the monster on the head. Kumbhakarna minded it not in the least; he blazed all the more fiercely. He roared so that the monkeys fell down bereft of their wits, sprang at Angada and sent his trident at him with a dreadful whirl. But Angada, a past master in all kinds of fight, escaped it lightly by his strength and agility; he sprang at his foe and hit him squarely on the breast. Kumbhakarna staggered a bit. Then he steadied himself, clenched his right fist and hit and threw Angada far away from him. That hero of a monkey could not stand it and fell on the earth all unconscious.

Then Kumbhakarna recovered his trident and rushed at Sugriva. The monkey tore up a mountain peak, rolled it round to give additional force to it and faced the *rakshasa*-prince. But he bent his body and limb and stood like a rock awaiting the impact. Sugriva addressed him as he stood there with his body smeared with streams of blood munching the monkeys without a stay or stop. "You have thrashed down the heroes among us; you have performed today feats of valour impossible to others; you have devoured my armies past count. Peerless fame you have laid to your account. But what have you to do with these puny creatures? Come to me holding this mountain-peak in my hand;- dare you stand the blow with this?'' Kumbhakarna listened to the brave and haughty words of Sugriva and laughed in thunderous tones and said,''I know you as the grandson of Lord Brahma; as the son of Riksharajas, you are well-known to the world for your valour and prowess. Then why waste your words in brag?'' (One day Brahma chanced to yawn frightfully; and Riksharajas, that renowned hero of a monkey, sprang from it. He was roaming one day in the world of Brahma and plunged into the cool waters of a lake in sport. But he was not aware of the peculiar nature of the lake. His form changed into that of an *apsaras*. Indra and Surya beheld her then, loved her at the same time and made violent advances to her. Then their soul-force found a way into the body of the monkey, one in the tail and another in the neck. The result was the birth of two children known later on as Vali and Sugriva. Lord Brahma laughed at it and said, ''Plunge again into the waters of this lake here and resume your monkey form''. So Vali and Sugriva are the grand-sons of Brahma and the sons of Riksharajas. Some have it that the line runs from Brahma, Kasyapa, Surya, and Sugriva. Kumbhakarna alludes scornfully to the birth of Sugriva and his being chased to the ends of death by Vali.

The lord of the monkey-world was enraged beyond control thereat and hit Kumbhakarna on the chest with that mountain peak, hard and cruel as the *vajra* in the hands of Indra. But it was smashed to powder, when it came against the broad adamantine chest of the *rakshasa*. Thereat the *rakshasas* shouted for joy and the monkeys grieved sorely. The *rakshasa*-lord was roused to fury thereby and opening his mouth wide that resembled a huge mountain cave, gave a leonine roar that caused the quarters to tremble and quiver. Then he whirled his trident aloft with incredible speed and sent it against Sugriva with intent to kill him. Adorned with garlands of gold, fitted with sharp points and spikes, it emitted flames as it fell on Sugriva; but Anjaneya rushed between and snatched it away and broke it to pieces with his bare hands .One thousand tons of black iron went to fashion it; and Maruti broke it like a chip of wood on his knees. It sent many a brave warrior to his death among the monkeys. They roared lustily when they saw that Maruti made short work of it. They took wild and frantic leaps and shouted themselves hoarse;

gaining courage, they rushed from all sides and crowded round Maruti whom they praised to the skies and offered reverence to. Kumbhakarna saw that his trusted weapon was broken. He tore up a peak of the mountain Trikuta and hit Sugriva with it. (He fought outside the fortress gates; and one may wonder how he could tear up the peak that was so far away. It is enough to say that his huge bulk managed it). The lord of the monkeys measured his length on the earth bereft of his senses. The *rakshasa*-host roared mightily with joy thereat. Kumbhakarna lost no time in throwing him over his shoulders and took his way back to Lanka with the speed of a tornado chasing before it light cloud-banks. As he walked along with the lord of the monkeys who was no light burden but resembled a huge cloud-bank, it gave him the appearance of the mountain Meru walking on the earth with its lofty peaks. The *rakshasa*-army praised him to the skies and shouted their war cries. But the hosts of *devas* were struck with wonder and cried ha! ha! in sorrow. If Sugriva, the king of the monkey-world, and the intimate friend and ally of Rama and Lakshmana is carried away there will be confusion in army. Then it is but light work to disperse them and Rama and Lakshmana will have to go back in despair.'' Such was the thought of Kumbhakarna as he concluded that the battle was practically over. On the other hand Sugriva was in the mighty grip of the monster and failed not to see that his army was melting away in fear. Hanuman too saw it through his keen intelligence and said to himself, ''What shall I do now? I cannot keep myself back from doing which is useful and prudent on the occasion. Shall I take the form of a huge mountain and crush the *rakshasa* to death under my weight? Or, I may bring back spirit and courage and cheer to the hearts of these monkeys if I kill him with my bare fist and free their king. Well, that is not so prudent. For his majesty will free himself in a moment. The *devas* and *asuras* combined cannot keep him in bond. But he is now unconscious through the effects of the mountain thrown at him by Kumbhakarna. Very soon will he recover himself and take such measures as will conduce to the interests of himself and the monkeys. If I precipitate matters and free him, that warrior king par excellence will be wroth with me, for it will put upon his fair name and fame an indelible blot. So let me wait a while. Let me see what Sugriva does. Meanwhile I will rally the troops and calm their fears''. So he stayed them all round and put hope and courage in their hearts.

Kumbhakarna made his way into Lanka carrying with him Sugriva of blazing lustre. Clouds of flowers rained on him from houses, aircrafts, towers, and palaces; fried rice and perfumes, fell upon him in torrents. The royal road was cool and brazing; and Sugriva was endowed with unparalleled strength and spirit; so he came back to himself very soon and found himself on the chest of Kumbhakarna of mountainous bulk and between his arms. All around him he beheld the mansions of the *rakshasas* and the inhabitants themselves crowding round. So he said to himself, "I am in the power of the foe and in his grip.

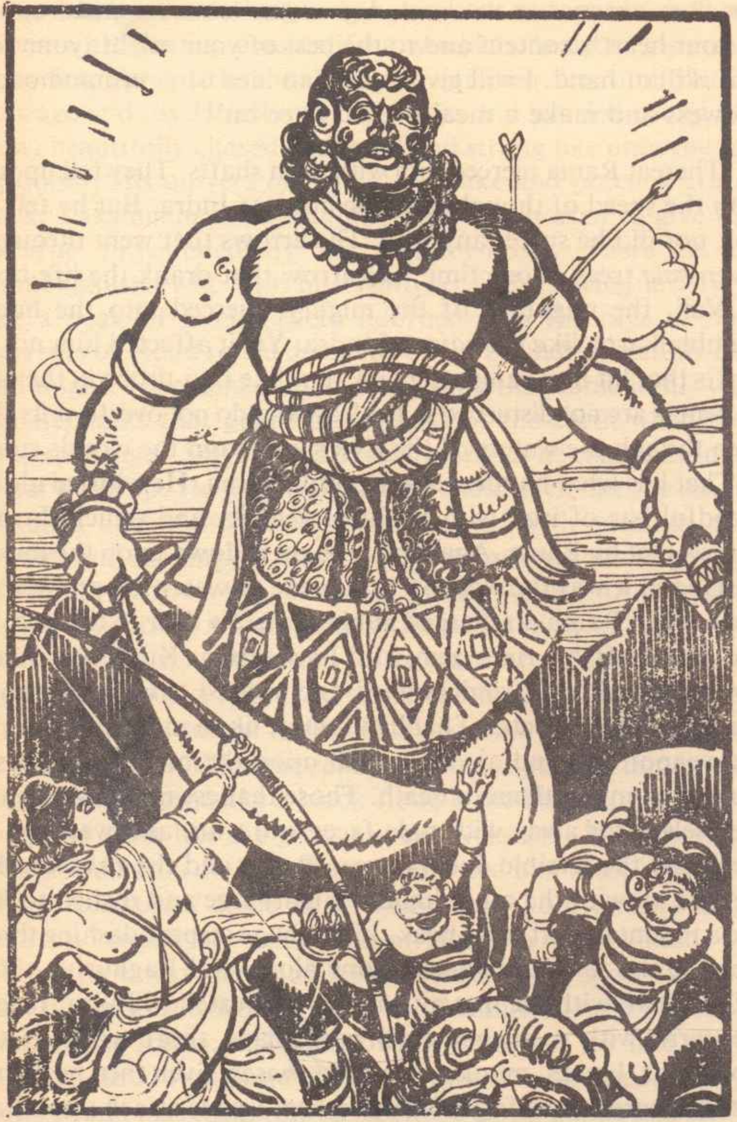
Now I should set about to free myself and make adequate return for the insult and injury he has inflicted upon me. What shall I do? Only that, which will conduce to the well-being and joy of the monkeys". Then he tore away with his keen claws the ears of Kumbhakarna and bit off the sides of his nose. Deprived of his ears and nose, Kumbhakarna was maddened with a torrent of blood flowing round his body and whirled the monkey aloft, brought him down with a terrific force on the earth and ground him beneath his feet. Even then, the monkey somehow managed to spring up into the sky above and reached the side of Sri Rama very soon. (It seems that he tore at the *rakshasa* with his feet on his cheeks, shoulders and stomach).

The *rakshasa* stood there bereft of his ears and nose, torrents of blood raining from him, like a huge mountain with its roaring and rushing streams. Boundless was his strength and valour; so he heeded it not, but came back to the battle-field. He could not put up with that insult. Vomiting forth blood, he resembled a mountain of black paint covered with clouds of a red hue. Finding himself without a weapon, he snatched a dreadful bar of iron and struck down the monkey-host and threw them down his throat; and his followers marched after him. He blazed like the Fire of Destruction on the last day of the cycles when all beings are gathered back. Even then his appetite was not satisfied; his craving for flesh and blood grew apace; he grew mad with the lust of battle; and he slew and ate without any distinction of friend or foe, *rakshasas,* monkeys, demons, and bears. Like unto the lord of Death laying low all creation on the day of universal destruction, he gathered in one hand monkeys and *rakshasas,* crushed them out of shape and ceased not throwing them down his bottomless mouth. Blood and fat flowing all over his body, struck and hit with mountain-peaks but heeding it not thanks to his extra-ordinary strength, two huge torrents of blood ran down the corners of his mouth as he bit and munched the monkey-hosts. Running with frightful speed he gathered together in his hands his enemies, seven or eight hundred at a time, crushed them to pulp and threw them down his voracious mau. Thereat the monkeys took refuge with Sri Rama, the Lord of the worlds.

Then Lakshmana was mightily wroth. He barred Kumbhakarna's way, sending into his body seven keen shafts. The *rakshasa* paid no heed to it; he passed by the prince and rushed at Rama while the earth shook under his feet. Then Rama hit him on his breast with a keen arrow into which he placed the weapon of Rudra. At once, burning cinders fell blazing from his mouth. Hit with the arrows of Rama, he howled dreadfully and stayed not his force as he struck down and chased the monkeys in fury. The arrows of Rama decked with the feathers of the peacock were imbedded in his chest and troubled him somewhat. The bar of iron fell from his grasp and the other weapons were scattered all around. Finding himself weaponless, he struck to death the monkeys with his fists and feet. Riddled all over his body with arrows, he resembled a mountain down whose sides roared torrents and cataracts of water. He was clean beside himself with frightful anger and lust of blood and continued to eat the monkeys, the *rakshasas* and the bears.Next he tore up a mountain peak and whirled it aloft and brought it down upon Rama, who reduced it to powder with seven dreadful arrows. At once two hundred monkey-heroes struck at him with shafts as he ran along blazing in his lustre like the mount Meru. Lakshmana of a righteous and just soul, thought over many plans to kill him and said , "Sugriva, this monster is crazy with the smell of blood and kills and eats the monkeys and the *rakshasas* without distinction. So let our warriors get up on him from all sides. Let our generals gather round him. May be he will crash down under their weight. Let them take care to avoid being crushed under him in that case."

Thereat these monkeys cheered up and climbed up the body of the *rakshasa*. He was immensely wroth at this and like an elephant in rut casting off his bonds, he flung away the monkeys from himself with the speed of thought. Rama beheld it and said, "This *rakshasa* is very dangerous." And he bent his bow and rushed at Kumbhakarna with flaming eyes as if he would burn up in his wrath his puny foe. At this the monkeys cast off their fear and plucked up courage and joy.He allayed their fears and whirled round him his bow, beautifully chased with gold and strung like unto the serpent of doom. His quivers of matchless make and potency graced his back; Lakshmana followed him close and started to give fight to his foe surrounded by his monkey-hosts. There he beheld Kumbhakarna who with his crown set with flowing jewels, shone like a peak of mount Meru adorned with the rays of the sun. Torrents of blood rolled down his body. Boundless was his strength and might. He crashed down everything that came in his way like the elephants that guard the regions of the earth when they are roused to anger. Surrounded by the *rakshasas* he chased the monkeys to eat them up. He was frightful to behold even like the mountains Vindhya and Mandara. He was adorned with garlands of gold, armlets and ear-rings of many a curious pattern and design. Streams of blood ran down the corners of his mouth like torrents from the clouds. He licked it with gusto as he gathered the monkeys and ate them up. His splendour and lustre was like a flaming fire. At the sight of that best and bravest of the *rakshasas,* Rama bent his bow, strung it and twanged it dreadfully so that the quarters trembled in affright. That filled the *rakshasa* with anger and impatience and he rushed at Rama like a black cloud lashed by a storm, with arms long and stout like the great serpent Adisesha. He tore along like a huge mountain on foot. Rama addressed him thus, "Most mighty of the *rakshasas!* come on and cast away your anxiety and care; here am I eagerly awaiting your arrival with bow in hand. I am he whom the world knows as Rama. In the short space of *muhurta,* your life-breaths will be forfeit to me." Kumbhakarna was convinced that he was Rama; he laughed with wrath and joy like a dreadful thunder-cloud flung away from him on all sides the monkeys that came within his reach, roared like huge cloud-banks and clove their hearts. Then he turned to Rama and replied, "Class me not lightly with that puny brute of Viradha, Kabandha, Khara, Vali, and Maricha. Know that it is he, Kumbhakarna that stands before you. See you the dreadful iron rod in my hands. It has been the means of worsting countless gods and demons. It is made of hard black iron. Would you slight me that I have lost my ears and nose? I feel not their absence in the least. I give you leave to spend upon me to your heart's content and to the best of your might, your valour and skill of hand. I will give myself an idea of your manhood and prowess and make a meal of you later on''

Thereat Rama pierced him with keen shafts. They fell upon him with the speed of thought like the bolts of Indra. But he felt them not, nor did he suffer any way. The arrows that went through the seven *sala* trees at one time, the arrow that drank the life-breaths of Vali, the mightiest of the mighty, pierced into the body of Kumbhakarna like the *vajra* of Indra. Yet it affected him not. The shafts that hit him vanished from view like rain-drops in the ocean. Its waters are not disturbed in the least and do not overflow its shores even though the waters of the rivers and from the clouds run into it. That has what happened to Kumbhakarna. He whirled aloft the dreadful bar of iron with frightful velocity and struck down the arrows sent by Rama. Again he brought it down upon the monkey-hosts; and it was the weapon that made to water the armies of the gods. Then Rama discharged at him an *astra* dear to the god Vayu and shore off his right arm with its weapon. Kumbhakarna was sorely pained by it and howled and roared dreadfully that the quarters shook in echo. That hand, huge like a mountain peak, and the weapon like Indra's *vajra,* fell upon the monkey-groups and crushed many of them to death. Those that escaped his grasp kept themselves far away with pale faces and wan, and watched most anxiously the terrible duel between Rama and the *rakshasa*-hero. He tore up with the other hand a mighty tree and rushed to Rama like a mountain reft of its peak. Like a huge serpent dashing through the sky, the *rakshasa's* hand came along and Raghuriva shore it off into two with the tree by an *astra* dedicated to Indra. It fell on the earth with a mighty crash and made short work of trees, mountains, blocks, monkeys, and *rakshasas.* Even then he blenched not; he roared most frightfully and kept up his attack upon Rama. Rama cut down his legs with two shafts known as *Ardhachandra* (shaped like a crescent). The quarters, mountains, caves, the sea, Lanka, and the armies of the monkeys and the *rakshasas,* shook in afright and gave back the crash that came out of the impact of



the legs with the earth. Bereft of his hands and legs, that mightiest of the mighty *rakshasas* paid no heed to it. He roared dreadfully with his mouth open like the ocean fire *Badava*. He rolled himself on the earth with incredible speed and came at Rama like Rahu rushing along the sky to swallow the moon. Countless monkeys and *rakshsasas* were crushed to death thereby. Kumbhakarna kept on throwing down his throat all that came in his way. Thousands of monkeys and *rakshasas* were drawn towards him by the speed of the wind that rushed from his infuriated nostrils and gave up their lives. Some were shot out far away and known no more among their friends. Thereat Sri Rama filled his mouth with keen arrows. Unable to speak clearly, Kumbhakarna gave a mighty roar and fainted away. Deprived of hands and legs, his mouth filled with arrows, even then he walked along on his stumps and crushed to death countless monkeys. Raghava beheld him as he ran against him; he knew that the moment of the death of the *rakshasa* drew near. He selected an *astra* over which Indra presided, spoke over it the particular spells and sent it against the *rakshasa*. It flamed like the noon-day sun; none could stay it like the rod of Brahma. It was intent upon destroying all things like Yama, the god of Time. Its force and speed was irresistible like that of the thunder-storm on the last day. Its joints were beautifully fitted; keen was its end. Like the lord of Day, in the full splendour of his crown, like the fire on the sacrificial hearth, fed to fullness by offerings and glowing in its joy, like unto the *vajra* of Indra or the bolts that crash from the blue, it clove the hearts of all that beheld it, with its speed. And Sri Rama discharged it at Kumbhakarna; the bands of gold shone upon the mighty *rakshasa*. In the far past Indra's *vajra* shore off the head of Vritrasura. Even so, the head of Kumbhakarna parted company with its body and fell down on the earth. It gave the beholders the idea of a huge mountain-peak coming down to visit the mortal world. The tusks glared out frightfully from his mouth; the beautiful ear-rings rolled upon it. The severed head of Kumbhakarna shone high and huge in the heavens, its splendour heightened by the ear-rings he wore. It sprang into the sky with the force that severed it and brought to those that beheld it, the memory of the moon shining between the two constellations — Punarvasu, ruled by the goddess Aditi. (So we should take it that Sugriva did not bite away that part of the ears to which the ear-rings were attached). That head of the *rakshasa* struck down by the arrow of Rama, fell down from the sky like unto a huge mountain. The houses and towers and lofty walls, the quarters of the vants, were destroyed thereby. Then his body measured its length on the battle-field, bringing death to millions of monkeys that ran to escape that fate. A portion of it shining like the Himalayas fell into the sea near Lanka, and countless were the crocodiles, whales, *Simsumaras,* sea elephants and other monsters of the deep that were crushed to death thereby; and even then the mighty body of Kumbhakarna sank to the depths of the ocean and clove for itself a way through its bottom.

Thus did Kumbhakarna who was the holy terror of the *brahmanas* and the gods, through his terrible deeds meet his death at the hands of the Almighty, the Lord in his boundless mercy. The earth, the mountains and the gods were mightily pleased and danced and shouted for very joy. The holy sages in the world of the gods, their brethren on earth, the *pannagas, asuras, bhutas, suparnas, guhyakas, yakshas, gandharvas,* one and all were beside themselves with delight at the illimitable prowess of Rama and sang his praises on high. The kith and kin and the retainers of Ravana beheld Kumbhakarna their lord and master who shone among them like a mighty banner thus done to death by *Raghupati.* Even like unto the *asuras* of yore who trembled at the sight of Lord Narayana, they cried in affright at the sight of Rama as he blazed in the radiance of war-like fury, boundless lustre and the flush of victory upon his arms. Like unto the lord of the day emerging from the mouth of Rahu dispelling the darkness and fear from the three worlds through his supreme effulgence, did Raghunayaka shine in the midst of the monkey-hosts. The monkeys with faces blooming with joy like blown red lotuses, praised Rama who, out of his supreme compassion, slew in battle Kumbhakarna of frightful strength, bulk and valour. Even as the lord of Heaven rejoiced when he slew Vritrasura who held in terror the countless worlds, did the son of Dasaratha rejoice when he slew in battle dire the best and the bravest of the valiant *rakshasas,* who routed the hosts of gods in countless battles and who knew not fear or fatigue when he stood up unto his foes.

CHAPTER 68

THE LAMENT OF RAVANA

THE *rakshasas* flew on the wings of speed to take the news of the death of Kumbhakarna at the hands of Rama, the great one. "Kumbhakarna our lord and master, who was death and destruction in human form among us even he is now on his way to the worlds on high sought after by great heros. He put to flight as if in sport the mighty armies of Sugriva. Thousands and thousands of monkeys found their way down his throat. For the space of a *muhurta* did he hold in terror and agitation every one about him and then he was subdued by the radiance of Rama; the fates snapped the thread of his life; and he is now crowned with eternal fame and glory. His huge body is shorn of its arms and legs; torrents of blood streamed from it; it is no pleasant sight to see; like the huge tree consumed by forest fire, one half of its lies in the waters of the ocean and the other half blocks our fortress gates like a lofty mountain. Your brother has been elevated to the halls of great heros on high, thanks to the arrows of Rama."

Ravana heard of the death of him who came into the world after himself; him who was his main stay and support through his supreme loyalty and matchless strength, courage and valour. Grief unspeakable had him in its mighty grip; his senses left him and he fell headlong from his lofty throne. Devantaka, Narantaka, Trisiras, Atikaya and others received the news of the death of their father's brother and gave vent to their unbearable grief in cries and wails and laments. Mahodara and Mahaparsva sank in the depths of sorrow at the news of the death of their brother. Then Ravana came back to his senses after a while and cried out, from a sore heart, "Alas! best and bravest! terror to your proud and defiant foes! boundless of strength: you have left me behind all alone and helpless while you take your way to the halls of Yama on the wings of the resistless time. I and our kin held on to you as our stay and support and hope; you have not wiped away our tears; you have not brought joy and happiness to our hearts; you have scattered your foes to the winds; and is it just of you, is it kind of you, is it brotherly of you to leave me alone? The *devas* and the *asuras* were a whisp of straw to me, thanks to my trust in you and this day has my right arm been shorn from my body. From this moment I am dead, though living . Wonder of wonders! matchless bulk of body, strength, and valour; the terror of *devas* and *danavas;* the fire of Dissolution whom his foes dared not draw near in battle and him, did Rama slay in battle. Why, the very *vajra* in the hands of Indra hit you fiercely but to be broken into splinters and it caused you no pain, not the slightest. Then how did it come about that you fell before the arrows of Rama and measure your length on the earth in endless sleep? Lo! there stand in the sky the gods and *rishis* and rejoice at the thought that their fear and danger are now things of the past. And my heart burns to behold it. This day is a red letter day in the annals of the monkeys where they may dance and sing in the fullness of heart. Lanka, its fortress gates, its walls, are now open to the monkeys to climb over. Without him by my side, what have I to do with this dreary kingdom of mine? What have I to gain by that Sita for whom I go through all this trouble and danger? He that came into the world with me, he that is dearer to me than life itself is now no more to gladden my eyes. Then why should I keep hold of this wretched body mine? In truth , I should torture infinitely him, who slew my brother; happier that that, I should lay violent hands on myself. Living, what joy, what pleasure, what delight, awaits me? Gladness and rejoicing for me after Kumbhakarna has passed away! My place will be with him who shared with me my joys and sorrows, here or anywhere. How could I bring myself to drag on a miserable existence here all alone and without him? The *devas* whom I brought to my feet with cries of terror and abject prayers on their lips now their time is come to flout me and hold me up to their ridicule. Boy! how shall I manage to defeat Indra without you?

Alas! I turned a deaf ear to the well-meant counsel of Vibhishana, the wisest of the wise. Gross ignorance and stupidity made me slight it at that time; but after the death of Prahasta and Kumbhakarna, most cruelly, that healthy advice is slowly but surely backing away at the roots of my heart. The soul of righteousness, my brother, I hounded him from here, thanks to my befogged mind through anger and pride; and I reap abundantly the harvests of that unspeakable sin." Thus did the ruler of Lanka wail and lament over the death of his brother, Kumbhakarna, out of a heart, dark and dreary and sorely confused. He gave a terrible cry, "Indra and his gods swooned away in affright at the very mention of his name. Kumbhakarna, thou paragon of valour and prowess; how was it brought about that you fell an easy prey to the lord of Death who quaked at the very thought of you?". And he crashed down upon the earth in a heavy swoon.

CHAPTER 69

ATIKAYA GOES OUT TO FIGHT

TRISIRAS gave ears to the laments of Ravana and hastened to address himself to his king and kinsmen. "Your Majesty speaks true; the countless worlds hold none that could take his place by the side of my uncle in valour and strength. And yet, he met with his death — an inexplicable mystery indeed. But great men like Your Majesty are not wont to grieve so over much. You have in the hollow of your hands the worlds three in number to protect and destroy; and it becomes you not to give way to grief like an ordinary mortal. You have from Brahma himself the mighty weapon, *Sakti,* divine armour, bow, and arrows as the result of your stern *tapas* and his grace. You ride on a car drawn by one thousand mules; it marches alone with the roar of the mighty cloud-banks. With your bare hands you have worsted times out of number the *devas* and the *danavas* and sent them to death. And should you enter the battle-field fully armed and nobly mounted, there is not the slightest shadow of doubt that Rama will lie low before you, a headless carcass. Put away care far behind you. I go forth to fight like unto Garuda that brings death to the huge sea serpents, I will make short work of the foes. Even as the king of the gods sent the *asura* Sambara to the halls of death, even as the Lord Vishnu wiped off the *asura* Naraka from the face of the worlds, shall I hack to bits that Rama with my dread weapons?"

His words brought peace and gladness to the heart of Ravana, even as he was granted a new and longer lease of life; and fate willed it so. At the words of Trisiras, Devantaka, Narantaka and Atikaya, were eager to fight and rushed towards the battle-field, each trying to be there before the other, roaring 'mine the first', (The *asura* Naraka was one of the sons of Viprachiti, the *danava,* and his wife Simhika; his brothers were Vatapi, Namuchi, Ilvala, Siruma, Antaka, and Kalanabha. Now Naraka was the *asura* killed by Krishna later on; but this was different). The *rakshasas* took the words of Trisiras as including themselves and started for the battle-field along with him like unto Indra, the ruler of the gods, in valour, coursing at will through the sky and the heavens; adepts at the magic art of illusion, the holy terror of the *devas,* never known to have given way in battle, or ever been worsted; unparalleled in the ranks of the mighty and illustrious heroes — they were never known to come back from the battle-field without destroying their foes. Their very names were enough to turn the hearts of the *devas, gandharvas, kinnaras,* and *uragas,* to water. They were intelligent and learned, valiant, past masters in the use of weapons, grown grey in wisdom, gifted with wonderful tools, radiant like the noon-day sun and a tornado in the heart of the armies of the foes. And Ravana surrounded by these sons of his shone even like Mahendra in the midst of the *devas* who curbed the pride of the *danavas.* He embraced them fondly, uttered mighty blessings over their heads and sent them forth to fight. With them he despatched his brothers Yuddhonmatta, Matta, to guard them, in case of any contingency. Like unto the planets circling round the sun, they went round in reverence Ravana the mighty hero, saluted him and took their way to the field of battle. Graced with every perfume of magic potency and herbs of wonderful powers, those six *rakshasa*-heroes were filled with the lust of valour and emerged from the capital. (Yuddhonmatta and Matta are but other names for Mahodara and Mahaparsva).

Mounted upon an elephant in rut, Sudarsana by name, born of the breed of Iravata, Mahodara came to the battle-ground like unto the sun blazing on the top of the setting mountain. On the turret fixed on its back were ranged in order quivers and weapons of every kind. Trisiras rode on a car drawn by noble steeds and fitted with every war like material. Three crowns adorned his three heads. They gave one the idea of the Himalayas, with its golden peaks; or like unto a huge cloud-bank resting on the top of a lofty mountain through which played lightning chains and over the surface of which coursed meteors and rainbows. Atikaya that matchless bowman rode on another car of divine make fashioned beautifully and skillfully and furnished with all kinds of weapons and coming upon one like the very armour of the sun a crown of molten gold chased with gems and ornaments of every kind gave him the look of the sun resting on the mountain Meru, resplendent with his thousand rays. That prince followed by the *rakshasa*-heroes marched forth to battle looked very much like Indra going forth to give fight to his foes the *danavas* with his hosts of the heaven-world about him. On his part, Narantaka started to go to the field of the battle decked with gems and gold and mounted on a horse fleeter than thought itself. It was huge of bulk; every kind of excellence went to adorn it; and it came of the lordly breed of Ucchaisravas, the horse that Indra bestrode. Even as Skanda himself on his peacock marching forth with his terrible *sakti* playing lightly in his hand, did Narantaka grasp a flaming spear like unto a blazing meteor itself. Devantaka was there with a huge weapon named *parigha* (bolt) of iron adorned with gems, and looked as if he was mocking the Lord Mahavishnu himself, who bore lightly the mountain Mandara, on the day when the gods and the *asuras* joined hands to churn the ocean of milk. Mahaparsva, of prodigeous bulk of body came along with a terrible club in his hand like the Lord Kubera with his mace. And these *rakshasa*-lords were followed by troops of every kind, infantry, cavalry, elephantry, and cars, flashing with weapons of various kinds and boundless in their courage and enthusiasm. The princes, radiant in the sheen of noble crowns on their heads, rivalled the Lord of the Day in lustre and recalled to one the notion of sacred planets coursing through the sky in their shining glory. The weapons that they bore shone like serried swans resembling autumnal clouds. "We go back with victorious arms or we take our way to the halls of immortal heroes in the heaven world." With these resolves on their lips did they roar and shout in their mad battle lust. They threw their arrows aloft in the sky and caught them back skilfully. The earth trembled in affright at the war cries of the *rakshasa*-heroes, their lion roars, proud challenges and shouts of joy; the sky was clean riven. Thus did that *rakshasa*-army issue forth from the fortress gates of Lanka and come upon the monkeys that expected them most eagerly with mountain-peaks and lofty trees and huge slabs to welcome them. The monkey-heroes beheld the *rakshasa*-troops and boundless was their delight and surprise. The vast array was coming towards them; countless elephants and horses were there in evidence; their tinkling bells many thousands in number fell sweetly on the ear; their ornaments and weapons shone on their black frames even as chain lightnings playing amongst cloud-banks; a smokeless fire, a radiant sun were the sights recalled to one's mind by the *rakshasa*-warriors blazing in their lustre; and the monkeys roared most frightfully and fiercely and cried, "This day, dawns upon a most noble battle. The *rakshasas* were no whit behind them and gave forth roar for roar and shout for shout.

Like unto mountains in the glory of their lofty peaks did the monkey-heroes grasp hills and mountains in their huge hands and made their way into the frightful ranks of the *rakshasas;* and went through it from end to end. Some fought from the sky and some from the ground; and kept an unceasing downpour of trees and rocks on the *rakshasas*. In their turn the *rakshasas* beat them back with their arrows. The monkeys and the *rakshasas* roared like lions every now and then. Huge slabs crashed down upon the devoted heads of some *rakshasas*. The monkeys sprang upon the *rakshasas* adorned with armour and ornaments of priceless value; some bore down upon the warriors in their car and others took charge of yet other *rakshasas* on their elephants and horses. Some of them were frightfully crushed by mountain peaks; some were hit by the fists of their foes and lost their eyes in consequence; many a brave warrior was hurled down and roared in impotent anger. Yet they brought their keen arrows to cleave the bodies of the monkeys. They struck at them with their tridents, rods, swords, javaline, *sakti,* and the like. Others were resolved in dead earnest to defeat their opponents; blood coursed in torrents down their bodies; they hit and thrust and pulled and fell senseless. That field of battle was in the space of a *muhurta* hid from view by the mountain hurled by the monkeys and the *rakshasas*. The swords were wielded and knives thrown; and from it there poured on all sides huge torrents of blood. The *rakshasas* filled with the lust of battle lay there all over the field like mountains uprooted. Some were clean hurled aloft by the monkeys; some were being thus punished; some had their tridents broken and yet rushed forth to fight with bare hands. Some *rakshasas* killed the monkeys by their own clansmen. Likewise some monkeys struck down the *rakshasas* with their friends as weapon, the huge slabs hurled by the monkeys were lightly struck aside by the *rakshasas* who slew the enemies thus rendered weaponless. In return the monkeys broke to pieces the weapons discharged by the *rakshasas* and slew them, smiting them terribly. They hit each other with mountains, tridents, and magical weapons; and roared and shouted like lions for pure joy. The *rakshasas* were struck down by the monkeys and had their armour smashed to bits and vomited torrents of blood like blood - flowing trees. Some monkeys struck chariots against one another and horses likewise. In fact, the monkey-troops were filled with boundless joy and glee and fought with the *rakshasas* with slabs, trees, and huge peaks. In the battle between the monkeys and the *rakshasas*, terrible to behold, weapons like *ardhachandra, bhalla, kshura,* sharp and keen, were freely used by the *rakshasas* to cut down trees and mountains. That field of battle was made impassable by crashing mountains blown to pieces, falling of trees broken to bits and by the dead monkeys and *rakshasas*. Gradually the monkeys grew apace in pride and haughtiness and joy, threw aside terror and care; with boundless courage and valour they gave fight to the *rakshasas* with weapons of various kinds. While the two forces were fighting with one another at close quarters, the monkeys roared in victory and the *rakshasas* were routed all along; the great sages and the hosts of the god-worlds praised the victors mightily and cried, "good,"good".

Narantaka mounted upon a steed fleet as the lord of air himself he grasped a terrible weapon named *sakti* and like a huge whale entering the deep waters of the ocean, fell upon the monkey-troops and with his flaming javelin he hit and clove the monkeys seven hundred at a time. In a moment he put them to flight single-handed. Why, the very lord of the gods trembled at his sight. Huge of body mounted upon a horse huge as a lofty mountain, he marked his passage with mire and mud made of the flesh and blood of the foes. On his either side were piled the bodies of countless monkeys of mountainous bulk struck down by the *rakshasas*. The *vidyadharas* and the *maharshis* grieved sore to behold it. Even before the monkeys essayed to attack him, he was upon them and clove them to pieces. Like the forest-fire playing amidst trees and shrubs and under-growth in the midsummer, did Narantaka roam through the battle-field with his blazing javaline, he verily reduced to ashes a very large portion of the monkey-hosts. Before the monkeys had time to discharge trees and mountains against him, they were struck down with his blazing javline like unto mountains struck down by the *vajra* of Indra. Like an angry storm crashing down black cloud-banks during the rains, did that *rakshasa* make himself felt all over the battle-field, and chased the monkeys all over. They could neither run away nor stay nor move. He pursued those that strove to escape by desparate leaps or stood dazed or sought to avoid him by the fleetness of their feet and to seek cover. Thus did Narantaka drive away behind the countless monkey-hosts with his fiery javaline to aid him, even like the Lord of Death stalking about a dying world with his trident. It fell upon them like the *vajra* of Indra himself; and the monkey-troops cried and howled most pitiably unable to bear with the onslaught. Like mountain peaks falling to pieces under the strokes of Indra's *vajra,* the bodies of the monkeys rained all over the place. Meanwhile the monkeys that were cruelly punished by Kumbhakarna sought the presence of Sugriva and were resting for a while.

He, the ruler of the monkey-worlds beheld his forces put to rout by Narantaka and escaping here and there in mad terror. He beheld that *rakshasa,* coming towards him on his lofty horse with the fiery javaline poised in his hands, ready to throw. He called out to Angada, who was by and said "Boy! your valour is on a level with that of Lord of the heavenly world, is it not? Lo! there comes that *rakshasa* on his horse and afflicts our forces sore. Bar his way, fall upon him and let his life be forfeit to you". The son of Vali, bowed in obedience; like the sun emerging from the black clouds did he march out from the midst of the black monkey-regions. That prince with a body hard as the very mountains themselves, decked with beautiful armlets looked like a mountain streaming with veins of ore. He had no weapons but his peaks and claws, not that he need any. He barred the way of Narantaka and cried,"Hear, you puny *rakshasa,* what are you about? What do you gain in the way of glory and fame by wasting your might and strength on these insignificant monkeys? Stay and hit me with the javaline in your hand that blazes like the *vajra* itself". Narantaka bit his lips at being thus slighted by the monkey; he hissed like a mighty serpent; he whirled aloft his fiery javaline and struck with it at the huge chest of the son of Vali. It came into contact with the broad breast of the best and bravest of the monkey-world; it was hard like *vajra* itself; yet it was shivered to bits. Like a serpent torn to pieces by the lord Garuda, it met the sight of Angada and inflamed him to fury. He laughed in thunderous tones, sprang upon the steed of Narantaka and hit on the head. The skull was clean cloven, the eyes gouged out, the tongue hung from the mouth and the noble steed gave up its life-breaths. Narantaka was mad with fury thereat and clenching his huge fist he struck Angada on the head a terrific blow. It crashed under the blow; torrents of blood rained over him; and he lost his senses for a while. Recovering himself in no time he was filled with wonder and blazed in his wrath. He brought his mighty fist huge as a mountain against the breast of Narantaka even as the bolt of Indra fell upon him. That *rakshasa* had his breast broken to pieces, vomited torrents of blood like unto fiery flames and fell upon the earth, a lifeless corpse drenched all over with blood, even as a lofty mountain hit by the *vajra* of Indra. Thereat a mighty roar of joy and victory came out of the monkey-host and the heavenly spectators ranged on high.

Thus did Angada place his account a deed of valour impossible for others to achieve and gladdened the heart of Rama. And Raghuvira, of matchless strength and valour could not praise him enough nor give expression to his wonder. Angada felt himself quite a new being thanks to the appreciation of Rama; his strength and courage and energy grew apace and he stood forth ready and eager to give battle once more.

CHAPTER 70

DEATH OF DEVANTAKA AND HIS FRIENDS

THE *rakshasa*-heroes raised a huge roar of fear and surprise when they beheld Narantaka done to death by Angada. Devantaka, Trisiras, Mahodara, were beside themselves with rage and fell upon the monkey-hosts. Then Mahodara mounted upon an elephant in rut like unto a huge cloud-bank rushed upon Angada. He could not contain himself for wrath at the death of his brother; and so Devantaka grasped a weapon named *parigha,* blazing like fire, drove a car shining like the sun in his noon-day glory and drawn by noble steeds. He barred the way of the monkey-prince who though brought face to face with these *rakshasas* of no mean might and repute, heeded it not. The lust of battle was upon him; and he tore up a huge tree with its branches and hit Devantaka even as Indra hurls his *vajra* at his enemy. But Trisiras cut it to pieces by keen arrows. Angada sprang in the sky and kept up a never ending downpour of trees, blocks and mountains. And Trisiras continued to shatter them with his keen shafts. Devantaka hit the trees and broke them with the point of his weapon *parigha.* Then Trisiras pierced Angada in his turn with his sharp shafts. And Mahodara joined him and drove his huge elephant against the son of Vali, and hit him on the chest with Tomaras, dreadful as the bolt of Indra. And Devantaka too joined in the attack and hit him sorely with his *parigha* and leapt back. Thus Angada, the son of Vali, was sore beset by the three *rakshasa*-heroes; yet he blenched not, he was absolutely a stranger to weariness or fatigue or pain. Endowed with speed, by nature, he increased it immeasurably on the occasion and hit the huge elephant with all his might. Its eyes shot out of its head; and it trumpeted forth in dreadful agony, unable to withstand the tremendous blow. Then Angada tore out its tusk and hit Devantaka with it. Like a huge tree struck down by a mighty whirl-wind, did that *rakshasa* feel his limbs give way under him; and torrents of blood rushed forth from his mouth, nose, eyes and ears. Then he steadied himself; his strength and lustre was a thing to wonder at;

he whirled above his head his terrible weapon *parigha* and brought it down upon the devoted head of Angada. The prince gave way before it and fell upon the earth on his knees; but the next moment he took a mighty leap aloft, whereat Trisiras hit him on the forehead with three keen shafts.

Thus did Angada manage to fight single-handed to three *rakshasa*-warriors of renown. He felt himself weary. So Hanuman and Nila came up to his aid. Nila tore up a mountain-peak and brought it down upon Trisiras. That son of Ravana cut it down by his keen arrows and it fell on the earth covered with sparks and flames. Then Devantaka bent his mighty bow to his ear and rushed at Anjaneya armed with his *parigha*. But Maruti met him as he came along and crashed his adamantine fist against him and caused the hearts of the *rakshasas* quake with fears by his lionlike roars. Devantaka, son of Ravana, measured his length on the earth a lifeless corpse; his head was cloven; his teeth were shattered; his eyes fell out and his tongue rolled out of his mouth. When that *rakshasa*-hero, who drove before him the hosts of the heaven-world was thus laid low, Trisiras was inflamed with wrath and pierced Nila on his chest with unceasing down our of keen shafts. Meanwhile Mahodara on his elephant of mountainous bulk clean forgot himself in his fury and shone like the sun on the top of mount Mandara. He struck with his continuous arrowy shower at the breast of Nila even like a huge cloud glorious with rain-bows and lightnings opened its discharge on a lofty mountain. The leader of the monkey-hosts was riddled through and through by these shafts; he was unable to move his limbs; and he stood there with his limbs tottering under him with fatigue. Yet he recovered himself after a while, tore up another mountain covered with forests and hit Mahodara on the head with frightful speed. Like unto a mountain on which fell the *vajra* of Indra did Mahodara fall upon the earth bereft of life with broken limbs and hardly recognisable. Trisiras beheld his uncle thus done to death and bending his mighty bow pierced Anjaneya with his arrow. The son of Vayu was enraged thereat and sent a huge mountain against the *rakshasa* which he broke to pieces by his arrows. Then the son of Ravana felt himself hit all over by huge trees. Yet Trisiras managed to meet them on their way to him and broke them to bits and roared lustily. Maruti leapt upon him all on a sudden and like a lion ripping open the skull of an elephant in rut, he hit and tore at the heads of the horses that drew the car with his keen nails. Even as the lord of destruction sends forth on the last day, the dreadful night of havoc, Trisiras threw a *sakti* at Maruti. It came against him like a fiery meteor in broad day light and none could stay its course; but that monkey-hero sprang up and caught it lightly and broke it to pieces. His mighty roar of joy was taken up by the monkey-hosts who echoed it like surcharged clouds when they beheld that terrible *sakti* shattered to pieces. Then Trisiras drew his sharp sword and brought it down upon the broad breast of Maruti, but the monkey-lord minded it not and struck at the *rakshasa* with all his might. The weapons fell from his nerveless hands; he fell on the earth bereft of his senses and everything it holds dear. Thereupon Maruti tore the sword from his hands and roared mightily, at which the *rakshasas* trembled in affright. That brought back Trisiras to his senses, and he hit Maruti on his breast in mad despair. It served but to enrage him the more; he sprang upon the *rakshasa,* gripped his crowned heads and even as Visvarupa, the son of Tvashta, had his three heads shorn off by the *vajra* of Indra did that son of Ravana meet his death with his very sword that crashed through his three heads. Like unto souls that fall down from their heaven-seats in the shape of stars when their merit has been worked out, did those heads burden the earth, blazing like fire and glaring with rage like huge mountains. The monkeys shouted for joy thereat; the earth quacked in affright; and the *rakshasas* took to flight all over the field. Mahaparsva beheld the deaths of the four *rakshasa* heroes, Trisiras, Mahodara, Devantaka and Narantaka; he snatched a huge mace fashioned of hard iron and leapt forth to battle. It was decorated with golden bands, and smeared with flesh and blood. Iravata, Mahapadma, Sarvabhauma and other lordly elephants that bear the earth lightly on their heads quaked in affright at the sight of it; It was steeped in the torrents of blood from the foes that fell before it. It was fashioned with beauty and skill; it vomited flames and sparks; red garlands decked it all over; and it blazed like the fire of universal destruction and shed its lustre and might on Mahaparsva himself as he fell on his foes. He troubled it mightily. Thereat Rishaba the monkey-hero leapt down upon the *rakshasa* hordes and faced Mahaparsva. The *rakshasa* hit him on the breast with his mace hard as *vajra* and backed with all his mad fury. The terrific blow clove his chest; he shook in helplessness and lost his senses for a while. Then recovering himself with a mighty effort he rushed upon the *rakshasa* to snatch the mace from his hands. And with that weapon he put the *rakshasa*-troops to flight all over the field; and followed it up by bringing down the devoted head of Mahaparsva, having whirled it round and round. Struck by his own weapon, the *rakshasa* fell upon the earth like a mountain hit by the *vajra;* his teeth and eyes fell out of his head. Thus did Mahaparsva, the brother of Ravana, meet his death. Then the *rakshasa*-host like a mighty ocean threw away their weapons and fled in mad terror to save their lives.

CHAPTER 71

DEATH OF ATIKAYA

ATIKAYA of boundless lustre saw with a sore heart his terrible *rakshasa*-warriors that sorely agitated; his brothers like unto Indra in valour were no more; his uncles, renowned heroes of the *rakshasa*-world, met their fate; and his wrath was something to see and he blazed thereat. Mountainous of bulk, the holy terror of the gods and the *danavas* fortified by powerful boons won from Brahma, he rode upon his car. Refulgent with the radiance of countless suns, blazing together and adorned with crown, armour, and ear-rings, he swung lightly his ponderous bow and roared and shouted his name and deeds of valour,while the quarters trembled in affright. The hearts of the monkeys turned to water at those lion-like roars and the dreadful twang of his bow. The monkeys were obsessed with the notion that Kumbhakarna, came back from the dead (such was the huge bulk of Atikaya) and clasped one another in their mad terror. Like unto Mahavishnu when he took to stride over the three worlds in three steps, his sight made the monkey-heroes filled with senseless terror and they hid themselves wherever they could find shelter. Some sought the protection of Rama, the Lord of the countless worlds. Raghava beheld from afar Atikaya, who sat on his car like one mountain upon another, roaring like the clouds on the day of destruction; wonder overcame him as he beheld the bulk of radiance and courage of the *rakshasa.* He calmed the fears of the monkeys and said to Vibhishana who stood by, "Who is that mighty bowman on his car, drawn by countless steeds; huge is his bulk like unto a mountain; and his eyes are tawney. Like unto Lord Mahadeva among his household guards of *bhutas* (elementals), I see around him shining in their lustre sharp tridents, spears and javelins. Many a weapon known as *sakti* illuminates his car like unto the tongues of death or the chain lightnings flashing through clouds. Even as rainbows grace lofty clouds are his bows ranged neatly in his car all round ready strung and decked with gold. Who is that carman, the hero that resembles the Lord of Day in his splendour? The battle-field is brightened by his radiance. I see the planet Rahu at the end of his banner. The quarters are lighted up by his arrows, resembling the rays of the noon day sun. He wields a bow like unto a rainbow with three graceful curves hard as adamant and beautifully adorned with gold. Its twang puts to shame the roars of mighty clouds. Four drivers are in charge of the four horses that are yoked to the car gay with gold and flags. Two keen swords are ready to hang on either side. They are about four spans round the hilt; and their length is ten such measures. Red garlands grace his shoulders; black of hue to see; his mouth is dreadful to see even like unto that of death. And he gives one the idea of the Lord of Day in the midst of cloud-banks. His mighty arms decked with ornaments and clasps of gold resemble the peaks of the mount Himalaya. His eyes are graceful and charming; and his face shining with ear-rings, resembles the moon in her full, in the midst of the stars of the Punarvasu constellation. The monkeys one and all flee when they behold him. Who is he?

And to him Vibhishana, "He is the son of Ravana himself, the younger brother of Kubera and the lord of the *rakshasas,* graced with his ten heads. Of frightful deeds and boundless energy, he is the heroic son of the Lord of Lanka. Like unto his father on the battle-field, he is ever reverent and humble with the great and the wise. He is adept of the adepts in the science of warfare. He is matchless in the management of elephants and horses, a perfect fencer and bowmen; endowed with peerless skill and ability in council and the practical application of the four means (alliance, persuasions, intrigue, and war). Lanka rests in peace, depending on the strength and valour of his arms. There is nothing he does not know in the matter of weapons human and divine or infernal. Countless are the foes that have fallen under him. He won the heart of Brahma himself by his stern *tapas* and has been blessed with weapons of rare and magic powers. Dhanyamali, the favourite of Ravana, is his mother. We know him as Atikaya. One of the boons he has from Brahma is that death comes not to him from the *asuras* themselves; that divine armour and car shining like the sun were given him on that occasion. Gods and *danavas,* countless in number have fled before him. He is the matchless *rakshasa*-hero who stayed the course of the *vajra* of Indra and the noose of Varuna by his mighty arrows. Wise and intelligent, he has curbed the pride and haughtiness of the gods and the *asuras.* We should defeat him before he consumes quite our monkey-hosts with the fire of the arrows".

Meanwhile that *rakshasa*-hero made his way into the monkey-hosts; he waved his terrible bow aloft and roared continuously. Kumuda, Dvivida, Mainda, Sarabha and Nila rushed forth to give him battle with trees and peaks; In a moment the prince reduced them to splinters and pierced the monkeys before them with his arrows made of iron. And they were utterly powerless before him, their limbs cloven and their hearts weak under the arrowy shower. Like unto a lion in the flush of his youth and might, chasing before it herds of deer, that monkey-host was put to flight by that *rakshasa*-hero. But he never hit any one who did not seek a fight with him. He came to where Rama was and spoke in supreme haughtiness, "Here am I in my car with bow, arrow, and other weapons. It is beneath me to seek a fight with the ordinary ranks of your hero. If there is any warrior of name and fame and energy among you, let him stand upto me".

Lakshmana was not the man to take it calmly; he sprang at his foe; bent his bow, strung it and twanged it so that the earth, the mountains, the sky, the oceans, the quarters, and the *rakshasas* trembled in affright. Atikaya heard it too, that terrible sound. And he of boundless lustre and strength was filled with wonder thereat. Then black wrath came upon him; and he snatched a keen shaft and cried, "Lakshmana, you are but a boy; you are strange to the deeds of valour; go. It is not in you to aspire to measure swords with myself like unto the Lord of Death. Why? The Himalayas, the sky and the broad earth dreamed not of withstanding the course of the arrows from my hands. Why, rouse the fire of destruction that slumbers happily under its ashes? Cast your bow in despair and go back. Why seek your death at my hands to no purpose? Or, if you will have it otherwise and face me in fight, well, take your place. Cast away your life behind you and take the shortest road to the halls of death. See you my arrows that play havoc with the pride of my foes? Like unto the trident of Rudra, decked with molten gold, resembling mighty serpents and even as a lordly lion cleaves the head of an elephant in its fury and drinks deep of its blood, this arrow will bathe in your blood". And hissing in his wrath he fitted it to the string.

Lakshmana was lashed to wild ungovernable fury at the words of Atikaya in his anger and pride. Boundless of strength and lustre in himself he could not put up with it. And so he gave back word for word, pregnant with many a meaning ingrained in it." "Hear you *rakshasa :* Do you seek to achieve greatnees but through words? Do you seek to become a hero solely through blowing your own trumpet? Wicked wretch! here I am ready to give you battle, bow in hand; put forth your bravest and best; a hero is he who speaks through his prowess and valour and manliness. You have come here in a mighty car furnished with every kind of weapon; and that shows you are here on business. Arrows or magic weapons, it matters not how you reveal yourself and your valour. Then I shear off your head with my keen shafts even as a mighty wind crashes down palm fruits. This day my arrows pierce through your vitals and drink deep and content of the blood flowing therefrom. Slight me not in that I am young. I am guilty indeed of that atrocious crime. But lay this conviction to your heart that it makes me more qualified to be your fact on the battle-field. Know you not that in the far past a boy by the name of Vamana (and he was Lord Vishnu incarnate) strode over the worlds three, in three, in three steps?" Thus spake Lakshmana with weighty reasons and pregnant meaning therein. It but served to enrage Atikaya the more; and he grasped a most powerful shaft. And then there came the hosts of the *vidyadharas, bhutas, devas, daityas, maharshis,* and *guhyas,* to see that rare fight.

Atikaya bent his bow, strung it, fitted the arrow carefully and shot it at Lakshmana as if he would swallow the broad expanse of the sky itself.

Lakshmana beheld it coming at him like a serpent of cruel venom; and he cut it into two with an *ardhachandra* (crescent arrow). Then Atikaya shot five arrows which Lakshmana made short work of lightly, even before they neared him. Then he hit the *rakshasa* on the forehead with a carefully chosen shaft, keen and radiant. Like a mighty serpent making its way into the clefts of a mountain did it pierce through the head of the *rakshasa,* and caused a torrent of blood to stream from it. Like unto the cities of the three *asuras,* struck by the arrows of Lord Rudra, did Atikaya tremble with the agony thereof. Then he pulled himself up with a mighty effort and after deep thought and consideration of his future course of action, cried, "Lakshmana I grant that you are a foe worthy of my steel. I admire your skill. You are well up indeed in the science of archery". With that he yawned frightfully, grasped his arms tight and set himself up; he took his place in his car firmly and discharged a never ceasing shower of arrows, one, ten, hundred, and so forth. Decked with golden bands, they hid the sky aloft under a mighty sheet of radiance and were terrible indeed like the messengers of death. Lakshmana was in no way troubled and he cut them down lightly. Then Atikaya selected most carefully another shaft and sent it at his foe. It struck him just in the very centre of his breast; like an elephant in rut streaming all over, his body was bathed in the torrents of blood. But he tore it away from him. And choosing a very keen shaft, he chanted upon it the magic *mantra* of the Lord of Fire himself and discharged it upon Atikaya. But the *rakshasa* made it square and fair with the magic weapon of the Lord of day himself. They fought for a while in the sky aloft like mighty serpents. Then they fell upon the earth, a heap of ashes, destroying each other. Atikaya chose the *astra* known as *Ishika* which Lakshmana met by the *astra* of Indra. The *rakshasa* was frightful in his wrath thereat and shot the *astra* of Yama himself, the prince, who struck it down by the *astra* of the Lord of Air. Then a cloud of arrows hid the *rakshasa* from view, only to fall back blunted and broken from his armour of adamant. A thousand arrows of might fell upon Atikaya thereat and failed to make any impression upon him, thanks to the boon the *rakshasa* won from Lord Brahma himself.

It was then that Lord Vayu came to Lakshmana on the battlefield, and said, "This *rakshasa* has been blessed by the Lord Brahma with an armour that no weapon, human or divine, can make any impression upon. So it is the *Brahmastra* and none other that will be effective in his case". Then Lakshmana chose the arrow, of unchecked course and speed; he chanted over it the magic *mantra,* the Lord Brahma himself, and shot it at the *rakshasa* lord. Then the quarters, the sun, the moon, the planets, the sky and the earth quaked in terror. Decked with gold and gems, that *Brahmastra* came to Atikaya like unto the *vajra* of Indra or the rod of Yama or the blazing fire itself with resistless speed. The son of Ravana beheld it calmly and sent countless arrows keen and cruel. But it swallowed clean and drew near the prince with a mighty rush like the Lord Garuda himself. Even then he blenched not nor was he troubled in the least and hit with sword, club, axe, trident, and other weapons. But it made short work of them and cut down the head of Atikaya, the beloved son of Ravana, with its diadem of gold and gems. Like unto the lofty peak of the Himalayas crashing down under a mighty blow, did that head crash down on the earth shorn of its glory. Such of the *rakshasas* as were spared after the mighty destruction, cried aloud and wailed blind with hot tears. The *rakshasa*-hosts were wan of face, downhearted; weary and faint and sore with the blows of blocks, and trees and mountains, they were heartbroken at the death of their mighty chief. They cast away behind themselves the very thought of fight and victory and took their way to Lanka on the wings of fear and speed. But the countenances of the monkey-host was bright and blooming like unto a bank of lotuses when kissed from their sleep by the rays of the morning sun. They roared frightfully and sang the praises of Prince Lakshmana who slew out of hand that dreadful *rakshasa* that came upon them with frightful bulk of body and boundless strength and valour; for did he not give them a long lease of life and everything that it holds happy and dear.

CHAPTER 72

RAVANA IN DISTRESS

RAVANA heard that Atikaya met his death at the hands of Lakshmana. His heart gave way and he cried, "Alas, wonder of wonders! the best and the bravest of bowman, a past master in the use and management of every kind of weapon, the very sight of a foe inflamed him quite, Dhumraksha, Akampana, Prahasta, and Kumbhakarna, every one of them; and many a hero of heroes among the *rakshasas* have gone to their fate at the hands of their foes. Of mountainous bulk, steady, firm, unshaken, and fathomless like the very ocean itself, boundless of strength and valour; ever eager for battle. They never knew in their lives what it was to be foiled by the enemy; but victory over their opponents was a matter of daily occurrence to them. In the matter of the mystery of magic weapons they had no peer. My son, famed through the three worlds for his strength and valour bound Rama and Lakshmana. Indrajit won from the powers on high the magic bonds of serpents. *Devas, asuras, yakshas, gandharvas,* and *kinnaras* cannot escape it. And those bonds, the two boys managed to destroy and break; I know not whether it was through their own skill and might; or through the magic arts of illusion that casts a spell over the foes; or through the potent strength of occult herbs and plants and leaves. Every one of those whom I sent to battle, my *rakshasa*-heroes have met their death at the hands of monkeys, strong beyond imagination. But I see not around me one who could defeat Rama, Lakshmana, Sugriva, Vibhishana or the monkey-warriors in battle. Wonderful indeed to think the might and power of that Rama, his innate strength and one cannot have any idea of what he wields through his magic weapons. When I come to think carefully over the fact that everyone of the *raksasas* I send against him has fallen a prey to him, I am forced to conclude that the man known as Raghava is none other than the Lord Narayana, the eternal one. Our fortress gates and doors in Lanka are ever closed through dire fear of him''.

"*Rakshasas!* guard ever carefully invisible in yourselves at every place and corner of this Lanka. No one passes without my order and without my knowledge into the *asoka* grove where I have placed Sita; and none goes out of it, likewise. I would have you that you be ever ready to go forth to fight, in the places assigned to you in Lanka itself. Never for a moment dream of under-rating your enemies, the monkeys. Are they ready for battle? Are they marching forth to it? Are they taking rest? Are they sunk in care and anxiety? All these things should be correctly ascertained and brought to me, every day in the morning, noon, evening, and at other times, as the necessity arises." Having thus issued his orders he saw that they were carried to the very letter. But anger and grief gripped him heavily and he took his way to his palace. Grief at the death of his sons, anger at the thought that he never knew what defeat was at any time of his life till then. This ate into his heart and deep sighs and fear broke forth from it.

CHAPTER 73

RAMA AND LAKSHMANA BOUND BY BRAHMASTRA

WHEN the *rakshasa*-forces returned to Lanka from the battle-field and informed Ravana of the death of Devantaka, Trisiras, Atikaya and others. Hot tears of burning grief coursed down the cheeks of Ravana; he was clean dazed and knew not what to do, like one demented. His sons and brothers met with a dreadful fate. And he lost himself in anxiety and gloom of heart that surged like the sea lashed by violent storms. Then Indrajit the best and the bravest that ever came of *rakshasa* line, addressed himself to his father and cried, "Ruler of the *rakshasa*-world; here am I Indrajit, born of your loins. Here am I in the might of my strength and valour, then what call have you to grieve? Have you ever set your eyes upon him whom the arrows of Indrajit hit in battle and returned to tell the tale? Behold Rama and Lakshmana cloven through and through by my weapons, their limbs hacked to bits, lifeless, their bodies riddled all over with my keen arrows and stretched on the bare earth never more to trouble us. I, that forced Indra himself to cry for mercy, I have never been approached in battle thanks to my innate might and thanks to the boons conferred upon me by high powers. Pay heed most carefully to the terrible vow I take upon myself. This very day will I pierce Rama and Lakshmana through and through without a space to put a needle in and that through my keen irresistible shafts. In the far past Lord Vishnu shone in his matchless radiance in the hall of sacrifice of the Emperor Bali. Even so shall Indra, Yama, Vishnu, Surya, the *sadyas,* the Asvin, Agni, the moon and every one behold my terrible valour and prowess that bring to play upon my foes." He roared and shouted his name and fame mightily.

Then he took reverent leave of his father; his energy and fiery enthusiasm was simply boundless. He took his seat on a lordly car drawn by countless mules and took his way to the battle-field. And in that car like unto the car of the sun in splendour and like unto and even excelling the speed of Vayu himself, did Indrajit, the son of Ravana, shine in his glory like unto the Lord of Day himself; and him followed many *rakshasa*-warriors in high spirits. They were bowmen, of matchless fame. Some on elephants; some on horses; they were armed with swords, trident, spear, axe, and other weapons. Conch, war drum, and other military music played all around; the *rakshasa*-world showered their blessings on him and marched along in his wake. Like unto the moon in its orb in the sky, seated in the shade of a huge white umbrella that put to shame the sheen of the conch or the moon, that son of Ravana, issued forth from the gates of Lanka. On either side there waved ever two *chamaras* with golden handles encrusted with gems. Why, the very town itself was irradiated by the splendour of Indrajit, even as the sky is illumined by the matchless splendour of Surya himself. He came to the battle-field, placed around his car his forces as guard over it, lit the holy fires, chanted mighty spells and offered food, parched rice, garlands and perfumes in it. On the four sides of the holy fire, the place of the sacred grass was taken by warlike weapons like *tomaras.* The sacrificial wood ordinarily used gave way to those made for that purpose out of the tree of Kali known as Vibhitaka. He was dressed in garments of deep scarlet; the instruments of sacrifice, spoons, ladles, and cups were made of block iron. Thus did he light the fire on the battle-ground; grasped the throat of a sheep of the purest black in colour, cut it and offered it as a welcome sacrifice. The wood once offered was enough to set the sacred fire ablaze without the slightest touch of smoke and in full radiance and lustre. The flames lapped round in auspicious circles. The Lord of Fire took human shape and adorned with garland armlet, ear ring, and crown, received the offerings so devoutly made to him. Then did that *rakshasa*-hero offer into the fire the *astra* of Brahma, his bow, his car, and last himself and everything that belonged to him. Then the sun, the moon, the planets, the stars and the very expanse of heaven trembled in affright. Like unto the fire in splendour, or like unto Indra himself in valour, Indrajit vanished aloft in the sky above with his bow, arrows, sword, car, horses, and charioteer.

Then the *rakshasa*-warriors came forth from Lanka mounted on elephants, horses, or cars and fell upon the monkeys with their keen arrows, *tomaras,* swords, tridents and the like. Then that son of Ravana, fire flashing from his wrathful eyes, cried, "keep yourself calm and cool and unshaken; bring up all your spirit, all your energy and all your enthusiasm and make short work of these wretched monkeys. " Then that *rakshasa*-army was filled with an overweaning resolve to win at any cost; they roared and shouted and cried terribly and kept up an unceasing downpour of arrows upon the monkeys. Indrajit on his part and his *rakshasa*-warriors struck down large bodies of the monkeys with their shafts of various kinds *nalika, naracha* and the like, clubs, bars, tridents, and grew more and more furious. Then the other monkeys tore up trees, mountains and blocks and hemmed the *rakshasa*-prince. But Indrajit who never knew what it was to go back in battle, waxed wrath, and grew more and more in strength and lustre. With one arrow he struck down in huge bodies the monkeys, five, ten and fifteen at a stroke. The *rakshasas* shouted in joy thereat. The arrows shining with the lustre of the sun and bound with precious bands of gold clove the bodies of the monkeys; and powerless to bear the torture and agony their pride and haughtiness were destroyed;they lost their desire and eagerness for fight; and like unto the *asuras* routed in battle by the gods in the far past, did they take to flight in all directions. But some monkey-heroes resolved to deal death to Indrajit who shone like the sun in the full hallow of his rays through his arrows, fell upon him from all sides and kept up a dreadful fight with him. But they would never stand before him even for a moment. Their bodies hacked to pieces, torrents of blood coursing down them, they were clean bereft of their senses and dazed and confused they took to flight as best as they could. Then they resolved to offer in the service of Lord Rama their strength, their power, their valour and their everything, even life itself, and so the monkey-heroes came back to the battle-field with blocks, mountains and trees in their hands. They closed round Indrajit and kept up a terrible deluge of stone over him. But he made short work of it in a moment and pierced the bodies of the monkey-hosts with his keen shafts, eighteen for Gandhamadana, nine for Nala, that was at a distance, seven for Mainda, and his vitals, five for Gaja, were quite enough.Beside himself with wrath like unto the Fire of Dissolution, he hit Jambavan with ten arrows, Nila with thirty, Sugriva, Rishabha, Angada, Dvivida and the other monkey-warriors with many a shaft, terrible of might, that he won as rare boons from various powers; they deprived the monkeys of their senses. He discharged most skilfully arrows that shone like the sun himself; and they fell on the monkey-hosts with the speed of thought and troubled them sore. Lashed by the ceaseless downpour, dazed and deluged with blood, that monkey-hosts were a source of boundless delight. Then he kept up the torrent of terrible shafts and weapons and caused his enemies unspeakable agony and torture. He plunged into the countless myriads of monkeys before him, leaving his troops far behind; invisible to all, his foes and like unto a surcharged cloud he let loose upon them his arrowy deluge. The monkeys were cloven in their bodies through the speed and force of the arrows; his magic arts of illusion kept them senseless and confusion. They howled most harshly; and like lofty mountains struck down by Indra they measured their length upon the earth covering it with their huge bulks. They but knew that the keen shafts fell upon them; but they could not have a sight of the *rakshasa*-hero that lay behind them. The prince hid from view all the quarters with arrows bright as so many suns; the sky and the earth were wiped out of sight. The best and bravest of the monkeys cried in despair and fear. Trident, *sakti*, axe, and other weapons blazing with sparks, and flames, his weapons were whirled aloft and brought down by the monkeys rendering them utterly motionless. Those arrows like unto tongues of fire went clean in their bodies and caused torrents of blood to burst. The monkeys, huge of bulk, gave the appearance of huge *simsupa* trees in full blossom. They clasped one another in fear, cried harshly and fell upon the earth like some who looked above were hit on the eyes; some utterly powerless to escape the arrows fell upon one another. Hanuman, Sugriva, Angada, Gandhamadana, Jambavan, Sushena, Mainda, Vegadarsi, Dvivida, Nila, Gavaksha, Gaja, Gomukha, Kesari, Hariloman, Viddyuddamshtra, Suryamukha, Jyotirmukha, Dadhimukha, Pavakaksha, Nala, Kumuda, and the other heroes of fame and renown were struck down senseless with spear, javelin, trident and other weapons. Further Rama and Lakshmana too came in for their share and were hit under a cloud of arrows like unto the fierce rays of the sun.

Raghuvira of boundless courage heeded not the shower as if they were so many drops that fell on a lofty mountain. Lakshmana! "This *rakshasa*-prince bases his hopes on the *Brahmastra* won by hard *tapas*. That enables him to harass the monkey-troops and put them to rout; further he troubles us with his cruel shafts. Thanks to the boon granted by him by Brahma, this mighty hero keeps himself invisible in the sky and destroys our forces. And our heroes, how could they fight him knowing not where he is, how could they defeat him? You base yourself on your innate greatness and ability to foil that all powerful weapon; but it is no good. The Lord Brahma that is the ruling deity of it and endows it with such a potency, is of boundless strength and prowess even beyond the power of thought. So bear with it most patiently even as I do the force of his arrows with unshaken fortitude. He hides the quarters from view with his arrowy deluge. And our forces have lost their leaders and take to flight all over the field, shorn off their lustre. So let us cease to fight and lie on the ground senseless and in a swoon. Beholding which this *rakshasa* will go back to Lanka very quickly with the crown of victory on his brows. Having warned his brother thus they were sorely hit with the cloud of arrows shot by Indrajit and measured their length on the earth. Thereat, the foe of Indra, was besides himself with joy and roared long and lustily. Having thus tormented the monkey-hosts, Rama and Lakshmana, he went back to Lanka to carry himself the first news of that supreme victory of his.

CHAPTER 74

RAMA AND LAKSHMANA LIBERATED FROM THE BRAHMASTRA

AT the sight of Rama and Lakshmana struck by the *Brahmastra* and utterly powerless, Sugriva, Nila, Angada, Jambavan and the other monkey-heroes knew not what to do; their troops were sunk in despair, as if demented. Then Vibhishana of matchless intelligence , calmed the fears of the monkey-heroes with sweet words and pleasant. "Fear not; our protectors are struck down senseless; yet there is no call to grieve over it. It is only out of respect and reverence to the weapon of the Lord Brahma that they seemed bound by the *astra*. The *rakshasa*-prince won the heart of Brahma by matchless and hard *tapas;* and received in return this *astra* of unimpeded force. And Rama and Lakshmana keep themselves bound by its bonds, through their reverence to the grand sire; within the space of a *muhurta* they will be alright even as before. There is no call for you to be in the least anxious over this." Maruti agreed with him, since he was once under the same mighty influence and said, let us pass over those that have been slain among us till now, and bring courage and hope to the hearts of those that yet remain alive." He took Sugriva with him and scoured the battle-field in the darkness relieved by glowing torches.

Monkeys and *rakshasas* shorn of tails, hands, feet, fingers, necks, and other limbs were there. Others too deluged with blood; others that in their abject fear wallowed in their urine ordure; yet others lay there dead of mountainous bulk; and others who fell before the terrible weapons of the enemy. There was not space for one to move about. Sugriva, Angada, Nila, Sarabha, Gandhamadana, Gavaksha, Sushena, Vegadarsi, Ahuka, Mainda, Nala, Jyotirmukha, Dvivida, Panasa, and other monkey-warriors of fame lay there scattered all over as if they were reft of their lives. In the short space of two hours were sent to their doom some thing like sixty-seven crores of monkeys by that redoubted *rakshasa*-prince, behind whom were the boons granted him by Brahma. That vast monkey-hosts like unto great ocean, were lashed to fury by the storms brought down upon them by the arrows of Indrajit and in that darkness and destruction did Maruti and Vibhishana seek Jambavan.

Old beyond words, riddled with arrows like unto a spent fire that son of Brahma came under the eyes of Vibhishana who said to him, "Alas; are you alive and free from death and danger at the hands of the keen shafts shot by the *rakshasas?* And to him did the monkey-warrior reply, "Lord of the *rakshasas;* of boundless might, know not where you were and it is only through your voice that I made you out. I am riddled with arrows and am not able to keep my senses together. Let that be. Is he alive and well and safe, that mighty Hanuman, born unto the Lord Vayu in that thrice fortunate lady Anjana?"

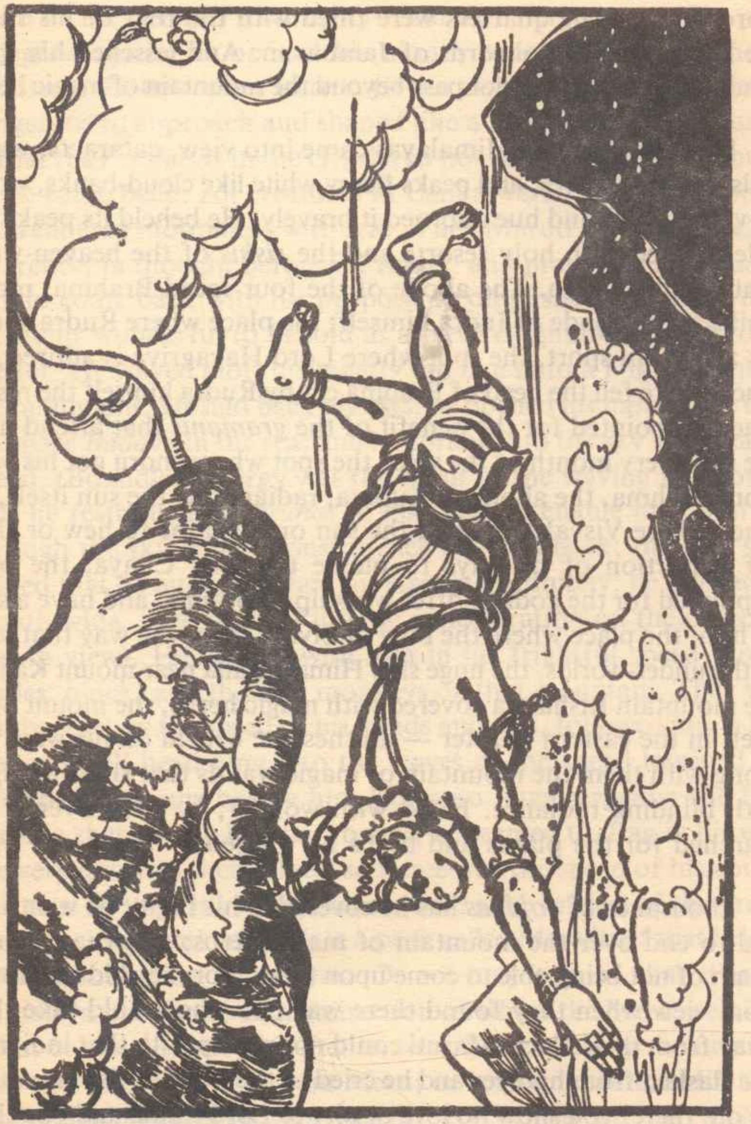
And this he spake with great difficulty unable to bring himself to it. And to him replied the *rakshasa,* "Sir, wonder! no enquiry or care about Rama or Lakshmana nor of His Majesty Sugriva, or prince Angada, whether they are alive or dead. Why so much attached and devoted to the son of Vayu?" Then said Jambavan, "Brave *rakshasa,* it is absolutely necessary that I should have news of Maruti. If he were alive we might take it that our armies are alive too, though they be destroyed utterly. If he were not alive we are dead, every one of us, though we are alive to all purposes. We can hope to live somewhat if he, the equal to the Lord of Air in strength and fierce of prowess like unto the Lord of Fire, is free from danger".

Then Hanuman touched the feet of Jambavan reverently bowed himself before him and gave out his name and antecedents. Jambavan thought on the tones of Maruti; and though himself sorely confused in mind and senses, he rejoiced greatly as if his vital breaths had come back to him. "Best and bravest of monkeys; come to me; it is upto you now to extend your protection over our dispirited forces. I see here none that is endowed with the requisite valour and courage therefor. You alone have it in you to render the greatest help to these. This is the time when you should put forth your strength and valour with the utmost. And I see no other that could do it as well. Put away from Rama and Lakshmana the danger that has befallen them through the arrows of Indrajit and bring back joy and hope to the monkey-hosts. Take your course straight from here above the ocean through the sky; go far till you come to the Himalayas, the monarch of the mountains. Beyond that you find the mountain Rishabha with lofty peaks of gold and far beyond that the tops of mount Kailasa. Between these two there is the mountain of magic herbs of plants. It is the home of potent medicinal products; and blazes in radiance thereby even like unto the Lord of Fire. On the top of it there could be found the *Mritasanjivani, Visalyakarani, Sandhanakarani and Savarnakarani,* four medicines of boundless potency, irradiating all the quarters with their lustre. Bring them unto me and I restore life to the monkeys, we have lost them". *(Mritasanjivani* revives the dead; *Visalyakarani* then expells the arrows from the body and makes him neat; *Sandhanakarani* then makes a whole from the broken parts and the cloven; *Savarnakarani* finishes the work by restoring the natural colour and aspect of the body to the places wounded and scarred).

At these words of Jambavan the son of Vayu waxed in strength, and energy and courage even as the ocean when the roaring waters of the rivers fall into it from all lands. He stood on the top of the mount Trikuta and pressed it with his feet to give him the impetus and force to course through the sky; and it gave him the look of one mountain placed upon another. The mount could hardly bear the impact of his feet; it clove and sank into the earth. Its tops were shattered by his force and huge blocks rolled down from it, lapped in tongues of flames. Lofty trees crashed down its sides; blocks were ground to dust; and the monkeys could scarcely keep their stand on it as it shook and trembled mightily. Towers and turrets in Lanka and the houses near them fell in ruins. The huge fortress gates shook in affright. The whole extent of the capital seemed trembling in terror all through that night. With mountainous bulk did he spring from Trikuta mount; and the earth and the seas were troubled sore. Then he went up the mountain that bordered the capital of Ravana. It was lofty like unto the mountains Meru and Mandara; it was glad to look at with its water-falls, woods, creepers, lotus pools, caves, and beasts. It was the home of countless gods, *gandharvas,* *vidyadharas, rishis,* and *apsarasas,* who lead a happy life there. Sixty *yojanas* was it in height and the dwellers thereon were struck with dread as they beheld his mighty form and fiery energy. He grew and grew apace; he opened his mouth wide like unto the horse *Badava* in the boundless waters. (It is a mythical volcano in the sea dangerous to approach and shaped like a horse). He roared lustily so that the *rakshasas* in the city dared not come out of their houses till he came back. All creatures in Lanka were filled with wonder and rendered motionless with fear. Then Maruti bowed himself in reverence, in thought before Sri Rama, and prayed to him that he should come back with his purpose accomplished and did a deed of valour wonderful to behold as a piece of humble service to his master. He waved aloft his mighty tail like unto a huge serpent of the mountains. He laid back his ears; he opened his mouth like unto the mare *Badava* in the sea; and he sprang into the sky with fearful speed. (Boundless energy was the result of the waving aloft of his tail; he restrained his *pranas* in his chest to enable him coursing through the sky and in consequence bent his back; the ears were folded that he might increase his strength infinitely; he opened his mouth wide, as a mark of intense concentration on the object he had in view). He carried with him in his frightful speed groves, glades, blocks and the very monkeys on that mountain. They were sorely beset by the speed of his hands and legs, followed him a long way and fell head-long into the waves as the speed lessened. He stretched his arms before him like unto huge serpents; the Lord Garuda shared with him in prowess; he seemed to drag in his wake the very quarters themselves, so fierce was the speed of his course; and thus he took his way to mount Meru the loftiest of the group. There is close to mount Kailasa a peak called Meru itself that belongs to the mountains Himalayas. Or we may take it that it is the Himalaya mountains in the direction of which the Meru reels itself aloft; or we might read it that he took his way along the northern quarter, where stands mount Meru; or it may mean the Himalaya mountains lofty even like Meru). He beheld on his way the fathomless deep, surging with mountainous waves and the monsters of the deep discoursing themselves therein. He sped along like the *chakra* shot from the hands of Mahavishnu, mountain, mountain-peaks, lakes, rivers, tanks, cities, countries, forests, passed under him in rapid survey, as he proceeded lightly and without the least fatigue though keeping up a uniform speed like unto his father, the Lord of Air. The quarters were filled with the roar of his flight. He kept in mind the words of Jambavan. And lessened his speed gradually that he may not pass beyond the mountain of magic herbs.

In short time, the Himalayas came into view, cataracts, waterfalls, torrents, caves, and peaks fleecy white like cloud-banks, woods of varied form and hue adorned it bravely. He beheld its peaks and sides dotted with holy resorts and the *rishis* of the heaven-world that dwells therein. The abode of the four-faced Brahma; mount Kailasa, the abode of Indra himself; the place where Rudra shoots his arrows in sport, the spot where Lord Hayagriva is adored, the place where fell the head of Brahma cut by Rudra himself the resting places appointed for the benefit of the *gramanis* that attend upon the sun every month of the year, the spot where Indra got his *vajra* from Brahma, the abode of Kubera, radiant like the sun itself, the place where Visvakarma tied the sun on his lathe to hew or shear off a portion of his rays to please the lady Chaya; the place appointed for the gods to offer worship to Brahma and have a sight of him, the place where the bow of Siva is kept, the way that leads to the under-worlds, the huge slab Himavatsaila near mount Kailasa, the mountain Rishabha covered with magic herbs, the mount Meru itself in the eastern quarter — all these he beheld on his way; and along with them the mountain of magic wands that shine at nights with blinding radiance. Filled with wonder, he went over it and searched for the plants and herbs he wanted.

Thousands of *yojanas* has he covered in his flight; he went from end to end over the mountain of magic herbs; and roared in his wrath of not being able to come upon them. For they hid themselves from view when they found there was one who would take them away from their place. Maruti could not put up with that indignity; fire flashed from his eyes and he cried to the Lord of the mountain, "You, there! you show no love or pity to Lord Rama and you think it proper and right to bar my way to the object I have in view. This moment will I reduce you to dust formless and thin with my bare arms". He took hold of that lofty mountain, and tore it up by the very roots along with the groves, beasts, ores, peaks, the tops, and



the *devas, gandharvas, siddhas, charanas,* and the other dwellers thereof. He passed his tail round its middle, tore it aloft and the gods and the *asuras* and all created beings trembling with affright and the hosts that crowd the heaven-worlds lauding him high, did he return with the speed of thought, like unto the Lord Garuda himself! Maruti shining in his radiance even as the Lord of Day, bore aloft in the path of the sun that potent mountain shining with the lustre of Surya himself. Then he looked like a rival sun facing the original one. Like unto the *chakra* in the hands of Mahavishnu, with its thousand points lapped in fierce flames, did Anjaneya shine with the huge mountain of magic herbs borne aloft.

The monkeys shouted themselves in joy when they beheld him and he, in his turn, for very success when he came near them. (It seems that the monkeys which were dead came back to life even while the magic mountain was far away, thanks to the potency of the very smell of the herbs thereon). The inhabitants of Lanka howled and cried, in terror, when they heard the monkeys' roar. Then Anjaneya came down upon mount Trikuta with the mountain of magic herbs held aloft. The monkey-heroes bent their heads low in reverence. Maruti clasped Vibhishana to his breast fondly. Rama and Lakshmana caught the perfume of the magic herbs thereon; the arrows of the weapons that pierced them fell out loosely; and they stood up free from all pain and discomfort. Those that were dead and those that were wounded were cured of their wounds and rose like strong men after a deep sleep. In fact their strength and valour and courage were increased immmeasurably. From the time that the monkeys and the *rakshasas* began to fight at Lanka the dead among the *rakshasas* were thrown into the sea by the orders of Ravana. He wanted the list of the dead to be brought to him and he desired that others should not know it. This accounts for the fact that among those brought back to life by the magic herbs the *rakshasas* found no place. Then the son of Vayu carried back the mountain of magic herbs to its original place and returned to the side of Rama.

CHAPTER 75

LANKA IN FLAMES

WHEN Sugriva, the ruler of the monkey-world acquainted Rama with his purpose and said to Anjaneya, "Kumbhakarna is no more; Atikaya and the other *rakshasa*-princes have been gathered to their forefathers. So we can expect that Ravana himself will come out to fight; and that we should not allow. The best and the bravest of our troops endowed with matchless speed should make their way into Lanka with flaming torches with them".

At this order of his the monkey-heroes took advantage of the sunset to prepare themselves to enter the city in the utter darkness of the first quarter of the night with flaming torches in their hands. From all sides they came at the same time, and drove away the guards before them. They set fire to towers, turrets, fortress gates, battlements, the houses thereon, roads, lanes, mansions, and everything they came across. Thousands of houses were reduced to ashes in a second. Palaces like unto mountains in extent fell down a flaming mass. The perfumes and the scents therein, sandal aloes and the like caught fire and the smell thereof on one side and the rank and poisonous fumes given out from living beings burnt to death on the other side were carried far and wide by the winds. Pearls, corals, gems, that adorn the houses, silks, blankets, vessels of gold and silver, weapons, the articles of use in the stalls of horses and the trappings thereof, the various paths of chariots and cars and the ornaments thereon, heroes, elephants, horses, armour shields, swords, bows, strings, arrows, *tomaras*, axes, *saktis*, and such like weapons, of offence and defence, sheep, goat, used to fashion fine and curiously wrought rugs, *chamaras*, bedsheets, counterpanes, tanned skins of tigers and deer, musk and other rare articles of use, residences decked with pearls and gem, heaps of weapons, curiously decorated houses, the abodes of wealthy *rakshasas*, armour fashioned of beaten gold, garlands, chaplets, all these were consumed to ashes in that conflagration.

Rakshasas under the influence of drink with their eyes rolling madly about, others staggering under the heavy load they have taken in others with their ladies coming behind them and holding their lord's garments, to steady their faltering steps, yet others with eyes flashing fire infuriated by the monkeys, others rudely disturbed in their amorous daliance, others armed with clubs, tridents and other weapons, others at their meals, and drinks, others indulging in deep sleep in the company of their women on rare and costly beds, others with wildseyes of affright, others on the wings of speed seeking means of escape, others fleeing madly with their children on their shoulders all these were reduced to ashes by thousands. Their blood, flesh and fat went to gladden the heart of the god of Fire; and he leapt high many a time to enjoy. The city was adorned with sky-scrappers, that barred the way and the course of the Lord of Day; of many a design were they and broad and spacious and finely fashioned every article of wealth and luxury and comfort found therein. Square, round, angular and many other mode were found therein. Windows of gold and silver encrusted with gems, seats and beds adorned with pearls, coral and precious stones, they were gay with the sweet music of peacocks, harems, and other rare birds as also with the melody of lute, flute, drum, and other instruments of music, like unto the seas with its rising waves were they in their splendour; all these were no where before the terrible fire. Doorsteps lapped by fierce flames, looked like rain-charged clouds, through which lashed chain lightnings, even as the peaks of lofty mountains crashing down under the impact of the *vajra* of Indra, some palaces caught fire and crashed down with a huge roar all at once. Ladies drowned in deep sleep, on lofty terraces, cast away their ornaments and shrieked and screamed in mad terror like unto the peaks of the Himalayas, flashing in their brilliance through the lustre of the magic herbs and plants thereon, the houses and the abodes, and the lofty palaces of Lanka met the eye everywhere in flames. Mansions were hid by roaring fires; and as the flames rolled on around them here and there they looked like *kimsuka* trees in full bloom. Elephants and horses, let loose from their stalls by the keepers thereof, gave one the idea of the last day of destruction when the oceans broke their bonds and the denizens of the deep ran in mad terror and confusion. In one place there was a horse that broke loose and ran in mad fright; and it was enough for an elephant to do likewise. In another place the rivers of the scene was enacted. The city of Lanka lapped in red flames was reflected in the water of the sea around; and they took on the hue and colour of red and scarlet. In the space of one *muhurta*, that capital of Ravana set fire to by the monkeys looked like this earth wrapped in fire on the day when the worlds were burnt to atoms. Hid behind clouds of fire and smoke, the women were clean suffocated and their cries of pain and terror were carried ten *yojanas* beyond. Some *rakshasas* escaped in the burning houses with scorched limbs, and the monkeys were ready to meet them and despatch them to the worlds of Yama.

Monkeys and *rakshasas* cried and roared and howled dreadfully and the ten quarters, the seas, and the earth itself quaked in affright. Rama and Lakshmana, restored completely, their strength and lustre enhanced beyond limits, grasped their mighty bows with utter calm and assurance. Sri Rama strung his bow and twanged it so that the hearts of the *rakshasas* were turned to water. Even as the Lord Paramasiva shines with his bow Pinaka, in hand fashioned in consonance with the rules laid down in the *Vedas* therefor, did Sri Rama shine with his bow; the twang of their bows drowned the cries and shouts of the monkeys and the *rakshasas*. These three separate sounds shattered the ten quarters. The arrows discharged by the bow of Raghuvira crashed down the towers and turrets of Lanka; and they fell as masses of dust like unto the peaks of mount Kailasa. The arrows found their way into lofty mansions, terraces, and towers and palaces; the sight maddened the *rakshasas* to fight madly and with no loss of time. Their roars like unto the lions and the forests made the very night itself terrible beyond limit.

Sugriva issued his orders to the monkeys, "Find your way to the ladies' quarters of Ravana; bar the passage that leads to the central portion thereof; and fight on bravely. He who lends not his ear to my commands, let him be slain out of hand. And his armies rushed forth with flaming torches and gathered round the gates of the ladies' apartment. Ravana was enraged beyond bound at this insult to him. He stretched his limbs with mad fury and the sound thereof made the ten quarters quake in fear. He looked like the very incarnation of the wrath that surrounds the limbs of Rudra on the day of universal destruction by fire. He despatched in hot haste Kumbha, Nikumbha, and countless *rakshasas,* to the battle-field;

and these were the mighty sons of Kumbhakarna himself. And there went with these, Yupaksha, Sonitaksha, Prajangha, Kampana, and other *rakshasa*-warriors and generals,"Go ye forth at once, make short work of the monkey-forces, and come back unto me on the wings of victory." These were the orders they bore on their heads. With shining weapons of offence and defence, shouting aloft with their war cries and deeds, of fame, in tones of thunder and cried, "this *rakshasa*-contingent dash forth from the city gates." Their natural lustre and splendour was heightened by the sheen of their ornaments; and the earth and the sky were bright with the lustre thereof. Meanwhile the moon rose on high as if to witness the coming fight. The moonlight and the star-light too were allied to the brilliance of the ornaments and weapons of the troops on both sides and it was enough to chase away utterly the darkness that lay on the sky and the earth. The light of the moon, the light of the ornaments, and the light of the flaming houses, exposed to view the forces of the monkeys and the *rakshasas* as if in the glare of mid-day. In the light of sky-clad palaces burning fiercely, the seas around that reached the under-worlds in their depths rose and rose with their rising billows; and it was a lovely sight to behold. Flags and banners waving idly in the wind and adorned with fish and many other device and design of a light pattern, swords, axes, tridents, clubs, javelins, harpoons, spears, and such like weapons, infantry, cavalry, elephantry and chariotry in countless numbers, ornaments, gold and gems, the sweet chime of bells, the reflected light from the weapons and the armour of warriors who used them in many a wise, the flames bursting from the arrows set to the string and drawn to the ear, the breeze laden heavy with the perfume of scents, flowers and garlands and chaplets fashioned variously, rare drinks and liquors, warriors and heroes of frightful appearance, shouts and cries and roars issuing from both sides like unto the roar of the sea itself in their volume and force, thus and many a wise the *rakshasa*-host marched forth to the battle-field like unto the seas bursting their bounds. And the monkey-troops on the other hand were no less ready to meet them; they shouted it back no less mightily. Then they rushed forth with resistless speed and fell upon the *rakshasa*-troop even as moths fling themselves on the raging fire. The *rakshasas* shone hugely in the shine of the weapons that they whirled and flung in ceaselessly. The monkeys were clean and mad utterly besides themselves. They leapt upon their foes and battered them with trees, mountains and adamantine fists. But the *rakshasas* were not behind in their attack and kept up a never ceasing shower of arrows and weapons that shore off the heads of the monkeys in countless numbers; thereat dreadful shouts of joy and triumph arose from the throats of the victorious *rakshasas*. But there were among them many who were bitten and torn by the monkeys in their ears, cloven heads, from the iron fists and limbs shattered by huge blocks; thus and many a wise did the *rakshasas* stretch their length in groups on the battle-field. Even so did crowds of monkeys crash down upon the earth thanks to the might and prowess and speed of the *rakshasas* themselves. There was one fighting madly with another; and there came upon him a third man who struck him down out of hand. There was one who was insulting another dreadfully; but there was a third party who drew his attention away by deeper insults. There was one who was taken to task by his foe for some breach of military etiquette and closed it up in biting him madly; but there was upon him a third one who bit him more cruelly. "Give, there he gives, I do give, why do you torture me thus? "Strike not, flee not, stay" and such like shouts were heard all over the field. Their garments, loose on their arms dropping wisklessly from their hands, spear, trident, and axe, raised aloft to strike in their mad rush towards the enemy, that battle-field was dreadful to behold as the armies swayed here and there to and fro. The *rakshasas* beat down the monkeys in groups; and the monkeys returned the compliment with interest. Their hair loose, their garments all awry, banners cut down, flags broken, armour shattered, thus did the *rakshasa*-forces take to mad flight while the monkeys barred their way and fought wildly.

CHAPTER 76

DEATH OF KUMBHA

WHILE the two armies were fighting thus most dreadfully, Angada chose Kampana, the *rakshasa* for a duel; and the foe challenged him in return and struck him on the head with a mace with terrible driving force behind it. The son of Vali shook woefully and lost hold of his senses; yet he came to himself after a while and tore up a mountain peak and hit Kampana squarely on his breast. That was enough for the *rakshasa* who stretched his length upon the earth, a hideous corps with shattered breast.

Sonitaksha noticed it and drove his car against Angada without the slightest hesitation or fear and riddled him all through with keen shafts and other variety of missiles *kshura, ardhachandra, naracha, vatsadanta, karni, ardhanaracha,* and *vipata;* these drove at him like the fire of destruction on the day wrapped in fierce flames. This but enraged Angada the more; and he made short work of the bow, the arrows and the car of the *rakshasa.* But his foe made light of it and sprang into the air with sword and shield and came upon Angada with the speed of thought. Angada was ready for him; he snatched the sword from his hand and clove the shield on the *rakshasa* from left to right even as he was investing him with the sacred thread. That sword served his purpose quite well, when he chased the *rakshasa*-heroes and caused their hearts to tremble with his frequent lion-like roars.

Then Sonitaksha whirled a huge bar of iron, fashioned like a mace, lightly and sent it against Angada. But Prajangha and Yupaksha drove their cars against the son of Vali at the same time. Like unto the moon between the constellations of Visakha, did that monkey-hero shine between Prajangha and Sonitaksha. Mainda, and Dvivida, his uncles were there to render him help if necessary; and they were at his side on the look out for *rakshasa*-heroes worth their arms. They did not wait long; and there came against them *rakshasas* of mountainous bulk, countless might and spirit with sword, shield and clubs. Then there began a fierce fight between the warriors of either side . The huge trees sent by the monkeys were cut down, lightly, by the sword of Prajangha. The trees and the rocks crashing down upon the cars and horses of the *rakshasas* were ground to dust by the arrows of Yupaksha. Sonitaksha on his part, broke down the huge trees thrown with mighty force by Mainda and Dvivida. Prajangha waved aloft a huge sword and rushed at Angada with deadly intent. The monkey waited calmly until his foe was within easy reach; he tore up a mighty *Asvakarna* and hit the *rakshasa* with all the force he could muster. Again he crashed his huge fist against the hand that held the sword; and it fell down from his powerless grasp. Prajangha noticed it and delivered a mighty blow at the forehead of the monkey-prince with his adamantine fist; and Angada was hard put to it for a while, so terrific was the force of it. But he managed to grow in strength and spirit and with a mighty blow of the sword of the *rakshasa* himself, clove the head and sent it speeding along the ground.

Yupaksha shed hot tears of rage when he saw his father's brother done to death; he sprang down from his car and since his quiver was empty, he sprang upon Angada with his dreadful sword waving aloft. Dvivida hit him on his breast and dragged him down. Then Sonitaksha, mad with rage that his brother was in the grasp of the enemy, put all his might behind the terrible blow upon the chest of Dvivida with his huge mace. The monkey was no weakling; yet he was confused for a while. Noticing that the *rakshasa* was about to deliver another blow with his club, he snatched it from his hand most skilfully. Meanwhile Mainda hit Yupaksha on the breast a dreadful blow. These warriors fought most fiercely, now dragging the enemy down to the earth and anon sending them whirling aloft in the sky. Dvivida tore at the face of Sonitaksha, dragged him down and ground him upon the earth. Mainda clasped Yupaksha with his arms and brought him down likewise. Thereat the *rakshasa*-host was filled with mad terror, lost heart, and ran to where the sons of Kumbhakarna were stationed.

Kumbha calmed their fears somewhat; he took note of the slain *rakshasa*-warriors; the monkeys were chasing their enemies without let or stay; he rushed at the monkey-forces and performed wondrous deeds of valour.

He bent his bow, strung it and kept up an unceasing shower of arrows upon his enemy with carefully selected shafts like unto the serpents of doom. His mighty bow to which were fitted arrows of matchless potency, resembled the rainbow in the sky radiant with chain lightnings and the straight *Iravata*. (The lightnings were the bowstring, *Iravata* was the mighty arrow, the rainbow was the bow itself. *Iravata* was straight in shape while the rainbow, the bow of Indra was semi-circular. *Iravata* appears along with the bow of Indra when danger and destruction on a large scale hangs over the country). Thus did he bend his bow and draw the string right to his car. He selected an arrow decked with gold bands and eagle's feathers and sent it against the foe. The monkey trembled sore in his limbs, staggered for a while, and crashed upon the earth like a mountain-peak hurled from aloft. Thereat Mainda tore up a huge block of stone and sent it at Kumbha; but the *rakshasa*-warrior reduced it to dust by five arrows; and with another potent shaft he pierced in the breast of Mainda; And the monkey-hero measured his length on the broad earth in a dead faint, his vital centres cloven horribly.

Angada beheld his uncles struck down thus, and sprang upon Kumbha, who stayed his course by five arrows fashioned of black iron, and with another three of the kind he kept him there motionless even as an elephant driver checks his mount by his goad. Then he pierced them all over with other arrows fleet as the mind and unchecked in their course. That son of Vali made light of it; he was in no way affected thereby and kept up an unceasing torrent of trees, peaks, and mountains on the devoted head of Kumbha. And the son of Kumbhakarna ground them to dust through his arrows. Noticing that Angada was about to spring upon him, he hit him between the eyebrows with two dreadful shafts like unto the hunters frightened and turned back elephants at night with blazing torches. Torrents of blood rolled down the face of that son of Vali and blinded his sight. With one hand he shaded his eyes and tore up a huge tree that grew near with the other hand, clasped it tight to his breast and shoulders and sent it hurling against Kumbha with all his bodily might behind it. Beholding the huge tree come at him like the banner of Indra or the mount Mandara, Kumbha cut it to pieces with seven arrows and pierced Angada in the bargain.

That redoubtable hero of the monkey-world was sore beset thereby and fainted away. The sight was too much for some of his friends as he lay there like a huge steamer sinking under the terrible impact of winds and waves.

They ran to Rama and cried, "Lord! Angada, whom the enemies dare not dream of approaching, is now struck down by them". And Rama said to the heroes around him. "Speed there too and render Angada the help that he stands in need of". And they mad with fury gathered round Kumbha. Jambavan, Sushena, and Vegadarsi, shot angry flames from their eyes; they tore up trees and mountains, and sprang at the *rakshasa*. Like unto a huge mountain barring the way of a roaring cataract he stayed them by his arrowy downpour. Even as the ocean never exceeds its limits, those monkey-heroes of renown could not pass on through this arrowy wall that blocked them.

The ruler of the monkey-world, Sugriva put behind him the son of his brother, sprang upon Kumbha, and roared like a mighty lion when he catches sight of a huge elephant in rut roaming on a mountain slope. Then he tore up many huge trees and hit Kumbha therewith. Seeing them come against himself, blotting out the earth and the sky, Kumbha made short work of it by his keen arrows, and cleared the clouded atmosphere and the bits and fragments fell down on the earth on all sides like unto spiked clubs known as Sataghnis. But Sugriva was in no way disturbed by it, and put up with that arrowy sheet for a while. Then he charged Kumbha, snatched away his bow and broke it to pieces. He followed it up and spoke to Kumbha who stood there like unto an elephant with his tusks broken and cried. "Mighty *rakshasa!* who came into the world before Nikumbha! wonderful indeed are your valour, martial training, skill, humility, the unchecked flight of your arrows, and you are qualified to stand by the side of Ravana in every way. Prahlada, Bali, Vritra, and others fell before Indra and Kubera and Varuna; and you stand on the same level. You and you alone take after your father Kumbhakarna in strength. If you take your stand on the battle-field with your bow bent and strung and twanged, the very gods dare not draw near you like unto cares that keep away from one who holds his senses under perfect control."

"Most wise and keen of intellect! display your skill and might in battle; let my heart rejoice thereat. Your father Kumbhakarna thanks to his natural strength and courage, and your uncle Ravana thanks to the wonderful boons he secured, foiled many a time the *devas* and the *asuras*. But I count you as the equal of Indrajit himself as a bowman; and like unto Ravana himself in fame, you shine among the *rakshasas* as the brightest jewel through your strength and valour. All creatures are to lose themselves in wonder and surprise when they behold the fight between us two, like unto what came about between Indra and Sambara, the *asura*. I am sure you did place to your record today feats of valour impossible unto others. You displayed your skill in the matter of weapons, human and divine. You hurled down monkey-warriors of dreadful prowess, but you have fought with many braves and are naturally tired. So I will not draw upon myself the blame of the world, for slaying when you are at a disadvantage. So I let you go. Take rest for a while and I will do likewise. Then I will give you a taste of my polity".

Sugriva, put upon him the cruellest disgrace possible in words that bore upon the surface esteem and honour. But Kumbha was not the man to put up with it lightly; it but added fuel to the flame. (It was like unto a stream of ghee falling into a flaming fire). His splendour and wrath grew apace. Then he cast his mighty arms around Sugriva and crushed him within them. Like unto two elephants in rut fighting for mastery these warriors breathed heavily now and then; they twined themselves round them and drew and pulled. Smoke and flames rushed out of their faces through the dreadful strain they suffered. Why, the very ocean itself was sorely agitated with mountainous billows. The solid earth gave way under the dreadful impact of their feet. Sugriva raised above his head Kumbha, the *rakshasa* and shot him aloft with the cry, "I send you on a visit to the ocean depths, free of charge". (Ramanuja, the commmentator, makes a remark. Lanka on the Trikuta was one hundred *yojanas* from the sea; and Sugriva must be mighty beyond compare to shoot the huge *rakshasa* across the island of Lanka right into the sea beyond).

The briny deep sent up its waters all around and overflowed itself at the impact of the body of Kumbha, even as if the huge mountains

Vindhya and Mandara were cast into the waters at once. But Kumbha came out lightly and hit Sugriva on his broad chest with his fist like unto the *vajra* of Indra. The ruler of the monkey-world emitted torrents of blood from a shattered chest. The fist of Kumbha was stayed somewhat by the bony framework thereof, even as the lofty peak of Meru hit by the *vajra* of Indra. There arose from the body of Sugriva frequent sheets of flame, thanks to the dreadful force of the blow. Yet Sugriva was mighty beyond compare; and so he made light of it. Clenching his fist hard like unto the Lord of Day in the full splendour of his noon-day glory, he waved it aloft and brought it down with indescribable force at the huge chest of Kumbha. The *rakshasa* was sore beset thereby; his senses were in a whirl; like unto a spent-fire Kumbha measured his length upon the broad earth. He looked like the planet Mars, falling down headlong from the sky with his blazing rays. Sugriva's blow shattered the chest of Kumbha; and when he fell headlong, he resembled the sun himself under the mightier influence of the Lord Rudra Himself. Thus did the Lord of the monkey-world bring the death of Kumbha, the bravest of the brave *rakshasas;* the earth and the mountains and forests therein trembled in affright and mighty fear held the *rakshasas* under its grip.

CHAPTER 77

DEATH OF NIKUMBHA

WHEN Kumbha, his brother met his fate at the hands of Sugriva, Nikumbha blazed as if he would reduce to ashes everything before him and rushed at Sugriva, the king. He snatched an iron bolt huge as a mountain; its hold bore the marks of the fingers of its owner and besides the sandal paste and scarlet powder; garlands and chaplets graced it. Bands of gold, gems, and pearls decorated it. Frightful to look at like the rod of Yama itself, it chased away the fear from the hearts of the *rakshasas* and infused boundless spirit and energy into them.

Like unto Indra's banner it was but a light reed in the dreadful grip of the *rakshasa,* who whirled it above his head and roared lustily out of his huge mouth, causing the waters to cry out in dread agony. It gave him the appearance of huge cloud-bank illumined with chained lightnings and rainbows, roaring lustily; garlands of gold graced his shoulders. Quaint armlets covered his arms; rings of gold and gem were pendent from his ears; and the dreadful bolt blazed in his grasp. The tip of this weapon broke the boundary walls of the kingdom of Vayu. He blazed like a smokeless flame. Alakapuri with its bright mansions of the *gandharvas,* Amaravati rich with the huge palaces of the *devas,* Asvini and the other constellations, Mercury, Venus and the other planets, were forced to bend themselves to change their course under the mighty wind raised by the whirling aloft of the weapon of Nikumbha. Resplendent with the splendour of that bolt, unable to be approached by his foes, Nikumbha, the fire of dissolution, began its work of destruction among the monkey-forces. The *rakshasas* and the monkeys stood motionless through fear. "Prajangha and other mighty warriors like him met their fate at the hands of these monkeys; then what call had you, puny creatures, to take your place in the battle-field". Afraid of this remark from Nikumbha, the *rakshasas* were filled with a new fear. But Anjaneya alone opposed him, with his broad chest, ready for anything that might come from the enemy. And he brought down the mighty bolt, whirling it above his head with his arms that gave one the idea of a rival bolt itself and hit Maruti on his chest; and he, the monkey-hero, was the last word on strength, valour and courage. And his breast was adamantine all through, so it broke to pieces upon it, the mighty weapon; and like unto a flame meteor from the sky it fell down on the earth; even as a huge mountain feels the influence of an earthquake did the son of Vayu tremble a bit under the mighty blow. Then he clenched his fist fiercely and hit straight and true at the breast of Nikumbha with all his force and speed he could lay behind it. Then the skin of the body of the *rakshasa* was torn to ribbons; torrents of blood coursed down all over it; and from it arose lightnings past count.

Nikumbha recovered himself very soon and crushed Hanuman in his mighty grasp. Thereat the inhabitants of Lanka cried, frightfully, "Hanuman, the mighty is now in the grip of our Nikumbha and helpless prisoner at that". Nikumbha himself bore him aloft towards Lanka; but Maruti struck him down with his fist and freed himself. Then he threw him on the ground and pounded him severely upon it; yet he sprang aloft in the sky and came down with a mighty force upon the monkey; then he crushed between his arms the head of the *rakshasa* and roaring lustily, he broke his neck. The monkey-hosts rejoiced mightily and roared like lions when they saw Nikumbha, the mighty, down to death; the very quarters trembled thereat. The earth shook to her roots; the sky clove in twain; and the *rakshasa*-host were in the grip of mad terror. Thereat Makaraksha rushed forth to have it out with Rama.

CHAPTER 78

MAKARAKSHA GOES OUT TO FIGHT

THE news of the death of Nikumbha and Kumbha made Ravana blaze forth in his wrath like unto the God of Fire. He clean forgot himself with anger and grief and cried out to Makaraksha, the son of Khara, "speed hence to the battle-field with all that you need in the way of troops; come back with victory over Rama and Lakshmana who have been driven out to the dark forests." Thereat Makaraksha was immensely delighted; his supreme confidence in his strength and courage made him accept the trust. He went round Ravana in reverence, touched his feet and ordered the commander of the *rakshasa*-forces that stood by to get his chariot ready and his troops to follow it. His orders were obeyed at once; and Makaraksha went round his chariot in reverence, seated himself therein and ordered his driver to take him at once to where his foes were. Then he cried out to his attendants and guards, "March forth before me all of you and begin the fight. His Majesty has ordered me to slay Rama and Lakshmana. My arrowy shower, tridents and other weapons shall, in no time, consume to ashes the brothers Rama and Lakshmana, Sugriva and his monkey-hordes like unto a forest conflagration, when it spread itself over dried wood in summer." The *rakshasas* felt themselves mightily cheered and uplifted by his brave words and marched forth to battle.

Able to take any from at will; long curved and gleaming tusks; tawny eyes, mountainous bulk, unkempt mops of hair at the mercy of wind and rain, blaring forth like mad elephants; they entered the field of battle, while the earth shook under their tread. The din of conch, war drum and other martial music being brought over thousands of spots, war cries, shouts, slogans, lion roars, ---- all met in one vast confusion and deafened the ear. Then the whip suddenly fell and slipped from the hands of the charioteer; the flag-staff on it crashed down for no reason whatever. The steeds moved with pain and difficulty quite unable to put forth their train evolutions and graceful. Their faces were wan and their eyes, blind with hot tears . A cruel wind and dust drove along as the wicked *rakshasas* marched forth to battle. These unlucky signs and evil portents made no impression whatever upon the *rakshasas,* so blind were they in their pride and haughtiness and conceit. Like unto cloud-banks or elephants, or wild cattle in hue, their bodies bearing the marks of many an honourable wound in countless battles, eager to meet their foe, they roared and shouted and cried on all sides every one trying to be the first to fall upon the monkey-host.

CHAPTER 79

DEATH OF MAKARAKSHA

ON their side the monkey-commanders beheld Makaraksha coming against them and stood ready to give him a warm welcome. Then there began a terrible fight between the monkeys and the *rakshasas* like unto the one between the gods and the demons in the far past. Trees, tridents, blocks, and bolts were freely exchanged without any concern or mercy. Yet others favoured the sword, the club, the bar, *sakti, tomara,* and heavy truncheons. The arrowy shower from the bow of Makaraksha brought dire terror into the hearts of the monkeys; they were clean bereft of their senses and scattered themsleves all over the field. Thereat the *rakshasas* roared and cried and shouted their joy of victory. Then Sri Rama bent his bow and stemmed the advancing *rakshasa*-hordes with a never ceasing stream of arrows. Makaraksha was mad with wrath thereat and cried ''Rama, stay where you are, I will even fight with you. The arrows from my redoubtable bow are sure to drink your life-breaths. You blew my sire in the forest of Dandaka; and I mean to clear the account overdue. The very sight of you fills me with boundless wrath. A raging fire burns me up quite when I think that you escaped coming within my view that day. Well, like unto the forest-beasts seeking their own death at the hand of the hungry lion, you have of your own accord sought my presence; I am really fortunate in that my long deferred hopes are to be realised today. You have to make a speedy and sure journey to the worlds of death, on the wings of my shafts. The *rakshasa*-heroes done to death till now by you will give you a place by their side and you will have a happy time of it. Why waste words over it. This is my advice to you. Let us fight today now and here on this battle-field with magic weapons, clubs, or bare hands or with any other mode of battle and let all created beings stand witness to it."

Rama laughed in derision, and said, "Hear you *rakshasa*!" waste no time in blowing your own trumpet. These boasts of valour and prowess become you not. No warrior ever succeeded in defeating his foe through a shower of empty words. True it is that your father Khara, Dushana and Trisiras, and their fourteen thousand warriors of renown met their deaths at the hands of my arrows in the forest of Dandaka. And today I go to add you to the number; vultures and crows with sharp claws and beaks will share your carcass, with jackals and have a glorious time of it.

Makaraksha was not one to brook such an insult; and he hid Rama under a cloud of arrows in reply. Raghava met them even before they came near and cut them down with his cruel shafts. The twang of their bows was heard all over the field like the rumbling thunder of huge cloud-banks. *Devas, danavas, gandharvas, kinnaras,* and *uragas* stood above them in the sky to witness that wonderful sight. Their bodies were clean riddled with their arrows; they were not behind hand of each other in cutting down the shafts of them. The quarters and the earth itself were hid behind the arrowy shower and nothing could be made out.

Then Rama waxed to wrath, broke the bow of Makaraksha, shot through the charioteer with ten Narachas and smashed the car and the horses. Thereat the *rakshasa* leapt from it lightly on the earth. He grasped a frightful trident *blazing* like the fire of the day of destruction and whirled it over his head and sent it at Raghava. The prince met it half way with three arrows and cut it down; and it fell from the sky into bits and fragments on all sides like blazing meteors. The hosts of the heaven-world ranged along the sky, shouted their joy and praise of the valour of Rama. "Well done, well done." Makaraksha was inflamed all the more; he clenched his fist and sprang upon Rama crying, stay, stay. Run not. Raghuvira in turn laughed lightly and sent the magic weapon of the god of fire at the *rakshasa.* His heart was cloven into two thereby and his life-breaths left his body. The *rakshasas* were struck with mad fear at the arrows of Rama, and tried to escape from it within the wall of Lanka.

Thus did the son of Khara measure his length on the earth, like a lofty mountain smashed with the *vajra* of Indra. And the sight filled Rama with boundless joy. (As discussed before, one view makes this battle take place on the morning of the tenth day of the fortnight. The other view puts it thus. Akampana and Prahasta were slain that morning; Rama broke the crown of Ravana; Kumbhakarna was roused and met his death in battle. The afternoon beheld Rama and Lakshmana bound by the *astra* of Brahma; they were freed from it that night; Lanka was set fire to. Kumbha, Nikumbha, Yupaksha, Sonitaksha, Kampana, Prajangha and Makaraksha, fell before their enemies).

CHAPTER 80

INDRAJIT GOES OUT TO FIGHT

RAVANA was informed of the death of Makaraksha and it only added fuel to the fire of his wrath. He ground his teeth and thought for a while what steps he should take next; and at last he despatched Indrajt to the battle-field. "Best and bravest of *rakshasas!* Rama and Lakshmana are endowed with boundless valour and prowess, and it is for you to defeat them. No one can equal you in might whether you fight, face or unseen. Even Indra of matchless valour, was forced to flee before you. And what are puny mortals in your sight?.

Indrajit accepted with humble reverence the task laid upon him by Ravana; he performed the necessary rites and ceremonies over the sacred fire built on the battle-field. *Rakshasa* ladies hurriedly brought red turbans, for the priests to wear. (The *Sruti* lays it down that in such a ceremony as this, the priests should wear head-dresses of scarlet). The sacred grass spread around the fire became powerful weapons of attack known as *tomaras;* the scared wood offered in the fire were then fashioned of the tree known as *Vibhitaka;* the priests wore garments of dark red; the spoons, cups and ladles were made of black iron. The *rakshasa*-prince built up the fire according to the rules laid down in the Books; he caught hold of a black sheep, cut his throat and poured the blood into the fire as an oblation. Once lit, the fire shone with lustre without the slightest touch of smoke; and Indrajit rejoiced thereat, since it promised victory to him that day. The god of fire took mortal shape, like molten gold in hue, and with flames waving gracefully from right to left, received the offerings made. Having thus gladdened the hearts of the Lord of Fire and the *devas, danavas* and the *rakshasas,* Indrajit got into his car and was lost to sight in the sky above. Four horses were yoked to it. A mighty bow and keen arrows adorned its sides. It was made of solid gold. Figures of beasts and moons adorned it. Its flag encrusted with gold and gems shone with the lustre of fire. Under the wonderful protection of the *astra* of Brahma, brilliant as a hundred suns, Indrajit was possessed of illimitable strength and prowess so that his foes dared not draw near. He issued forth from the gates of Lanka, and made offerings into the fire to the accompaniment of *rakshasa* spells. (These were dear to the heart of the god Nirriti). He rendered himself invisible and cried, "I slay in battle this day, Rama and Lakshmana, falsely disguised as hermits, and will lay the trophy of victory at the feet of my father. This day witnesses the extinction of the monkey-creation from the face of the earth; the hearts of his Majesty and the *rakshasa*-world will rejoice thereat".

He flashed across the field of battle and waxed wroth at the sight of Rama and Lakshmana dealing destruction, as their arrows fell like showers from their bows bent and drawn to their ear looking like three-headed serpents. (The mighty shoulders of the princes and their lofty heads justify this description and attest the high and divine character of the princes). "These are verily the objects of my attack today". He drew his bow to the ear and riddled them with his arrowy shower. The princes saw that an invisible one was attacking them from the sky above; they in their turn fitted keen arrows to their bows and pronounced spells of wonderful might. They covered the sky above with their resistless arrows and hit him thereby; but their force and brightness touched him not. The magic of the *rakshasa* spread a cloud of darkness, smoke and mist over the sky and hid the quarters from view. They could perceive nothing, neither his form nor the twang of his bow or the rolling of his car. In that utter darkness, his arrows alone fell upon them irresistibly without let or hindrance. Wonderful boons had he secured through his hard and terrible penance; he was beside himself with wrath; and he pierced Rama in every limb with shafts brilliant as the sun. Like unto a mountain side worn out by streams, the princes were pierced with *narachas* and in turn sent against him arrows bound with gold. They flew fast across the sky as birds, went clean through him and fell on the earth, bathed in his blood. And the princes cut down the arrows of the *rakshasa* with many a *bhalla* (a warlike weapon). They marked the place where these came from and despatched mighty arrows in that direction. But Indrajit spread himself all over the sky with the speed of thought and ceaselessly hit Rama and Lakshmana with keen arrows causing them untold pain and trouble. Bristling all over with his arrows, blood streaming down their bodies, they looked like lofty *kimsuka* trees in full bloom. No one could make out the form, the bow and arrows or the course of the *rakshasa*-prince. He was like the Lord of Day hidden under cloud-banks. Monkeys were struck down in hundreds and thousands and slumbered on the earth.

Thereat Lakshmana was clean beside himself with wrath and cried, "Brother mine, allow me to clear the earth of the entire *rakshasa*-brood in an instant with the *astra* of Brahma". And to him replied Raghuvira, "Boy, not so. The folly and guilt of one is not reason enough to deal death to the entire *rakshasa*-race. There are many here who do not fight; many have taken cover; many raise their hands and appeal for protection; many take to their heels; and many are careless of their own safety. To slay them is against law and justice. Bend your might on the death of this foe alone. Let us send against him magic weapons of utmost speed. This wretched *rakshasa* has by his magic arts made himself and his car invisible. The *vanara*-chiefs will not let him escape with life, once they see him. My arrows will reach him and destroy him wherever he may be. He may enter the bowels of the earth; he may fly into the skies; he may take refuge in the worlds below or the heavens above. Yet my arrows will consume him and lay him on the battle a miserable corpse''. And he thought of the means for bringing about the death of that cruel *rakshasa*.

CHAPTER 81

THE ILLUSORY SITA

INDRAJIT was aware of Rama's resolve and came back to Lanka straight from the battle-field. He thought over the unfortunate death of Kumbhakarna and other countless *rakshasa*-heroes; his eyes were bloodshot with wrath; and radiant, he came out through the western gate surrounded by countless *rakshasas*. The son of Ravana who could strike terror into the hearts of gods and *asuras*, found Rama and Lakshmana ready to give battle to him. Hence he brought into use his magic art of illusion to help him. (He wished to conduct a rite in the grove of Nikumbhila and win magic weapons that no foe could withstand. Till then Rama and Lakshmana should be kept busy fighting so that they might not interfere with his preparations. And to that end he utilised the arts of illusion. He could not approach the princes, since they were blazing in their wrath. Besides them, there was only Hanuman who was acquainted with the form and features of Sita. As for Vibhishana that illusion could not deceive him. He desired to practise it upon Maruti and came out through the western gate, where the monkey-hero had taken his stand. And Rama and Lakshmana were not able to perceive him there). He placed beside him on his car a form like Sita's and began to kill her in the very midst of the *rakshasa*-forces.

He wanted to cloud the senses and the intellect of the monkey-hordes and drew near them with the false Sita. And they fell upon him from all sides with rocks, and trees. Anjaneya led them with a huge mountain peak and there he beheld in front of him in the car of Indrajit, the lady Sita herself. She was wan and heavy-eyed with grief, her hair braided carelessly in one plait. Her garment was covered with dust and dirt; her form was emaciated with fasting and her limbs were dim and dark. She was a miserable sight to see as she sat there and Maruti was startled thereat. He gazed upon her intently for a while and decided that she was the lady Sita; for, had he not met her and spoke to her only a little while before. Her fear and agony, as she lay helpless in the hands of the *rakshasa*, brought burning tears into the eyes of the monkey-hero and his heart grew weak. He said to himself, "What is the purpose of this wicked *rakshasa* in bringing here on his car the lady Sita?" Then he rushed at the car of the prince followed by many a mighty monkey. His foe was beside himself with rage thereat; blood suffuced his eyes and they blazed like baleful fires as he drew his sword and catching Sita by her hair, struck her again and again before the eyes of the monkeys. And she cried and wailed again and again, "Rama! Rama!". Hanuman beheld this unspeakable outrage offered to her who was dearer to Rama than his very life; to her who was the embodiment of womanly excellence and purity. The wretch drew her here and there by the hair of her head. What could he do? Hanuman's heart was broken; wrath overcame him and with streaming eyes, he cried. *"Rakshasa!* Are you seeking the shortest road to the darkest hell? How dare you lay hands on the hair of the beloved of Rama? You boast of your descent from Brahmarshis; yet your low *rakshasa* nature has not left from you. Fie! upon your meanness and foul habits! Monster of cruelty! base wretch! miserable sinner! the lowest and the most abandoned wretch in all worlds would not soil his fingers with such a deed. Mercy and tenderness are utterly unknown to you. This lady here is a prey to sorrow and misfortune; house, home, kingdom, friends, and husband all these she has lost. What crime has she done to deserve such treatment at your hands, such a cruel death? Verily, I say unto you, your death treads close upon the heels of hers. This single act of yours is enough for me to annihilate you. The hell destined for those who lay violent hands on women is yours for ever". And followed by the monkey-generals, he rushed at Indrajit, but *rakshasa*-heroes of terrible prowess barred the way. In his turn Indrajit spread terror and confusion in the monkey-hosts by his dreadful shower of arrows and said to Anjaneya, "I know full well, for whom you are here Sugriva, yourself and Rama. It is for Janaki. But this Janaki shall fall by my sword before your very eyes. Then will come the turn of Rama, Lakshmana and yourself, Sugriva and Vibhishana. You condemn the slaughter of women. But everything is fair in war. Nothing should be neglected that could bring loss and destruction upon one's foes". And with his keen sword he cut the illusory Sita from right to left; the bloody cut looked like a sacred thread thrown over her. Soon she fell on the earth, covered with blood and crying "alas! alas!" Then Indrajit turned to Hanuman and said, "Now look here, my wrath has preyed on the wife of Rama. Sita is dead. All that you have done and all that you do, hereafter is utter waste". And he roared and shouted for very joy. The monkeys near were struck with confusion and stood there helpless, unable to approach the *rakshasa*-prince in the midst of his *rakshasa*-warriors.

Thus did that wicked *rakshasa* slay the figure of lady Sita and his joy thereat was boundless. On the other hand the monkeys lost heart and fled from the battle-field.

CHAPTER 82

THE NIKUMBHILA YAGA

HEARING the proud words of Indrajit, which fell upon the ears of the monkeys like Indra's thunderbolt they fled in all directions. Anjaneya beheld them low-spirited, haggard and in the grip of mad fear and cried, "Friends, what makes you lose your heart and you take to flight from the battle-field? Your prowess and valour, where are they? Does it become you to turn your backs to the enemy? Are you not warriors, one and all and come of noble descent? I shall go before you and you may follow me in safety". Thus did he put cheer and courage into their hearts; and they in turn were filled with energy and enthusiasm and armed with trees and rocks followed him joyfully with dreadful roar. Like unto fire wrapped in flames, did Anjaneya fall upon the *rakshasa*-host in mad fury dealing death and destruction all around. Even like Lord

Yama destroying all beings, on the day of dissolution, Hanuman clean forgot himself, in wrath and grief and hurled a huge block of stone on the car of Indrajit. But the charioteer beheld it in time and skilfully took the car far away. So the huge rock failed to smash the car, the driver and the horses and fell upon the earth making a deep depression, and countless *rakshasas* were smashed to pulp beneath it. Then the monkeys fell upon the *rakshasa*-prince in a body, and kept up an incessant downpour of rocks and trees; they slew many a *rakshasa*-warrior and roared variously in their joy. Dreadful *rakshasas* past count rolled there on the battle-field, struck down by large and lofty trees. Indrajit beheld his forces thus destroyed and hit the monkey-generals with his keen shafts and brought fear and confusion among the enemy's troops while his followers sent countless monkeys to their death with their tridents, swords and bars.

In another part of the battle-field, Hanuman gave a good account of himself as he annihilated the *rakshasa*-heroes with trees, peaks, and blocks of stone. He barred the way of the *rakshasa*-army and cried out to his monkeys, "Let us go back; what have we to gain by defeating this *rakshasa*? We counted our lives cheap enough, if they could be of any service to Rama and bring joy unto his heart. She for whom, we fought and killed, she, the lady Sita, was slain right before our eyes. Let us take news of this to Rama and Lakshmana and abide by their orders". Then he turned away from the field of battle with all the monkeys after him and sought the place where Rama had stationed himself.

But Indrajit saw that his purpose had been achieved, and crying "Now is my chance", and hastened to the grove Nikumbhila. He built up the sacred fire and offered into it flesh and blood. The fire that sprang therefrom was like into the setting sun. Indrajit, a past master in such mysteries, offered unto the fire the oblations that would bring him and his *rakshasas* fame and prosperity. And there stood around him many *rakshasas* who were experts in such rites and ceremonies.

CHAPTER 83

LAKSHMANA CONSOLES RAMA

RAGHUVIRA heard the huge roar that arose from the battle between the monkeys and the *rakshasas* and said to Jambavan that stood by, "Friend! Hanuman is busy with some wonderful act of valour; what else could be this terrible roar of deadly missiles crashing in furious fight? So go out with your troop to help him". Jambavan did so and took his way to the western gate. Half way he met Hanuman at the head of a very large body of monkeys breathing hard with their incredible exertions. Maruti, in his turn, caught sight of that huge army of bears coming towards him dark and dreadful like dense clouds in winter. He even made them turn back and come with him where Rama was and with grief uncontrollable cried out. "We were engaged in hot fight; and right before our eyes did Indrajit slay the lady Sita with his sword as she was screaming and shouting for help. From that moment I am bereft of my senses and came here only to bring you this sad news."

No sooner did these words fall upon his ear then Raghuvira fainted and crashed down upon the earth like a huge tree. When the godlike Raghava fell down all on a sudden, the monkey-lords gathered round him and sprinkled over him cool water, rich with the perfume of lotus and lily. It looked as if a deluge of water fell and extinguished the flaming fire. Lakshmana clasped him to his breast; and sore stricken as he was himself with grief, sought to console Sri Rama with words charged with sound reason and deep wisdom.

(He desired to console Rama and bring him back to himself, from his deep despair at the news of the death of Sita. So he criticised mercilessly the nature and value of right and wrong. He asserted that the wisdom of the elders would have us rely mainly upon our own strength and valour). "You ever seek to tread the path of righteousness by carrying out the commands of your father. Kaikeyi and Dasaratha have wrested from your hand the crown that was within its grasp. Yet your heart is not in the least clouded thereby.

Your senses are under perfect control. Righteousness and justice are utterly powerless to save you from calamities. Why? Simply because they are idle words useful only in arguments, unreal like the horns of the hare. And injustice and sin are equally unreal and useless. Why? They have not been able to prevent the *rakshasa* Ravana from enjoying everything his heart could desire; I warned you long ago that it is utterly useless to take upon yourself the accomplishment of your father's commands. Let me prove to you how right and wrong are not supported by authority. Now what is authority? They are canons that are applied to the ordinary life of men. What are they? Is it direct perception, inference, or the word of the scripture? Let us take perception first. All things animate and inanimate are within the range of our five senses; but right and wrong are not; so this canon of perception does not help us, not in the least. (Tirtha has it that in the last *sloka,* Lakshmana argued that *karma* could not be supported by inference because happiness and glory were not the part of Rama who practised righteousness. And now he proves it again through the canon of perception). Even as the entire creation,movable and immovable, is open to the test of perception, *dharma* too should be open to the test. For we should sense it as we do the objects of creation; we do not. Then there arises the question to answer — why should righteous men like you be marked down for trouble and calamity? And why should wicked wretches like Ravana revel in glory and pleasure? (We are not justified in saying that right and wrong do not exist, on the bare ground that they are not open to perception. There are many things that our senses cannot grasp, but which exist for all that. Now though right and wrong may not be grasped by our senses, yet their effects must be within the reach of our knowledge and experience. Now it cannot be said that happiness is our portion at present; hence, the absense of the effect (happiness) proves the absence of the cause itself — *karma* (Tirtha).

I shall prove to you that right and wrong are not supported by the canon of inference. If wrong was true and real then Ravana who is wedded to it should have for his portion the darkest hell. Similarly if *dharma* was true and real then men like you who are ever wedded to it, should never experience calamities. The world hails you as the soul of virtue and justice; if so pain and sorrow should never find a place in your life. Likewise happiness and glory should never find a place in the life of Ravana whom the worlds condemn as a monster of wickedness. That is why I say that the case of *dharma* has no ground of reason to stand on. (Govindaraja says that the canon of inference fails here). Righteousness that you guard so carefully pays you back sorrow and misery as the reward of unrighteousness. On the other hand unrighteousness that Ravana clings to, pays him back with happiness and glory, as the reward of righteousness. Further, *dharma* and *adharma* not only fail to bring to their votaries the results that they should — namely, happiness and misery, but they reward their followers with the very opposite results. Am I wrong then in thinking that they have no existence whatever? You may say that we have seen examples of *dharma* bringing us happiness and *adharma* bringing us misery. Then *dharma* should bring peace and happiness that is its legitimate result, to you of all men because your thoughts and words and deeds ever centre round it. And Ravana should reach the depths of misery, since his heart ever twines itself round unrighteousness. But we see that he pursues unrighteousness and waxes in fame and glory, wealth and happiness; while righteous souls see no end to their misery. That is why I assert that righteousness does not bring happiness, nor wrong doing misery.

Further *dharma* and *adharma* cannot find a place in our scriptures. It may be true that sinners reap misery; and righteous men are rewarded with happiness. But this misery and this happiness have but a brief existence; after three seconds they perish utterly. How can this transient *dharma* bring prosperity to anyone, or this transient *adharma* bring misery to any one? *Dharma* and *adharma,* have but a momentary existence as they are put into practice. Then they are incapable of producing results that should in the nature of things follow after a time. When the *Vedas* say, "stones float", it is nothing more than a figure of speech. Even so vedic texts about *dharma* and *adharma* are only figures of speech. You may say that it matters not if acts do not exist beyond the moment. For, the gods worshipped through these acts may reward us with the very appropriate results. One goes through misery by that power or brings misery to another by the same means; if so grief and sorrow, the results of that sin follows that god. And he who reaps the results has no part in it. Even so are happiness and pleasure, the results of *dharma*.

You may say that *dharma* and *adharma* are but other names for the Lord himself who is worshipped by virtuous acts and offended by wicked deeds. Then it is the lord that brings about and distributes happiness and misery. And he who reaps those results has no hand in it. You may say, "A king who owns no master formulates a rule of action out of pure frolic. He rewards those who obey and punishes those that break it. Similarly, the Lord rewards those that follow faithfully the laws he has sanctioned; and punishes heavily those that do not obey him and act perversely". Let me ask you, "Does He do so to please himself or others?" Then he who has no desire for anything, whose desires have all been realised, the perfect one who has nothing more to achieve. He has no ground for action of any kind. He will lay himself open to the charge of making one the four-faced Brahma and another a beggar; and this means partiality. You may reply, "Partiality never finds a place in one who brings into manifestation souls according to their previous acts. Why, can he not easily impel souls to confine themselves to the path of virtue? He who knows everything cannot stain himself with this blot. Why not you go further and charge him with utter mercilessness? Let us say that he gives them the judgment to do acts of virtue and wise, consistent with their deeds in former births through the stream of *karma,* coming down from beginning — less time. Well, the acts of previous lives give one the impetus to do similar acts in this life too. The very same reason impels him to do acts of virtue in coming births. Thus one should consistently commit himself to a life of virtue or vice all through and reap the results thereof all through in the shape of pleasure and pain. But it is not so in the world; there is no rhyme, no reason in what takes place here.

Let us say that the power that brings about the results of action is what is known as *apurva,* which is generated by the action itself. Well, that power is not to be seen by inference or direct perception; and the highest good of man cannot be the outcome of that force. If there is any such thing as *dharma,* no sorrow or calamity can touch you, who are its life and soul. But you are now in the grip of unbearable misery. So there is no such thing as law of *karma*. And there is no room for the element *apurva,* since its results are not manifest. How do we say that the cause does not exist simply because we do not sense the results? Then we should posit the non-existence of objects beyond the reach of the senses. Even though we do not come by the results patently, we can infer the cause if there exists any of the auxiliaries: Now, *dharma* which is the chief cause and manliness, the auxiliary one and its absence counts for the absence of happiness too. *Dharma* cannot produce results independently of any other power; it is not able to do anything by itself. Happiness must be the outcome of something else that endows it with the power. So I think that there is no call to practise primarily that *dharma* is spasmodic, weak and unable by itself to give one happiness. In the achievement of any object, *dharma* is but an accessory to manliness; so it is open to us to lay aside *dharma* and devote the same energy to the development of manliness. You may say, "though *dharma* in general is subject to the above defects, the particular *dharma* of keeping one's promise should at all costs be practised". Well, you hold that it is *dharma* to keep one's word. But our father was the first to go against that *dharma*. He promised to make you the prince and the heir. Did he do so? Then he was the first to run his back upon *dharma*. Though you are his first born and endowed with all divine excellences, he doomed you to a life of misery in the dreadful forests and drove you forth from the kingdom without a spark of pity. It is but just that he should be placed in confinement and in chains. Ought we not to deal punishment to those that swerve from *dharma* as it is enjoined in the scriptures? You, who promised to carry out the word of your father, why did you not do so? He proclaimed before the people assembled that he would crown you; That was a father's promise; and his exiling you to the woods was also a father's promise. Why then did you choose to disregard the first and carry out the second. It seems that you did not guard truth well and justly.

Even if *dharma* and *adharma* exist, a king should not pursue either blindly or without discrimination. Great men have ever held that one should practise both according to the results desired and consistent with the changing times. If it is the rule that one should practise *dharma* alone all along, why did Indra slay Visvarupa first and then perform sacrifices to free himself from the sin. Was it not enough if he just performed sacrifices. If it is the law that one should indulge in *adharma* all along consistently, then Indra need not have slain Visvarupa and performed sacrifices later on; it is quite enough that he just slew him. It is said that Indra, Varuna, Parjanya, Yama and Isana belong to the warrior-caste among the *devatas*. So Indra a *kshatriya,* has practised *dharma* and *adharma* according to the changing times. If one should practise either exclusively and all the time, he is sure to be ruined. So they should be taken in hand as befits the changing times and practised together. I have not the least doubt on this matter. (Lakshmana argues that there is no authority for existence of *dharma* and *adharma.* Even if there was any, he says that they are not primary causes. Now he tries to prove that Rama did not choose the path of *dharma).* Now wealth is absolutely necessary for the proper practice of *dharma* and you gave it up, when you threw away the kingdom that was within your grasp. Then how could you hope to carry out your *dharma?* Rivers flew from mountain tops; and you protect your people and take from them a sixth of their earning, which goes to meet the expenses of charity, rituals and similar action. As the water of streams disappear in summer, even so the acts of those who are poor and weak are ineffective. If you forgo wealth, it means not only inability to carry out your *dharma.* Sin follows upon it too. If you turn your back upon wealth and luxury, to which you have been accustomed from your birth, you will drive to acquire riches through unfair means; for you cannot in the nature of things forego what you have been used to and that leads to sin. A rich man is sought after by friends; kinsmen gather round him; he is considered a learned man. Verily a rich man alone is a man; a poor man is like a weak woman. A rich man is valiant; he has brains; he is a hero endowed with all excellences and one who casts away wealth rejects all the perfections mentioned above and seeks the opposite. I cannot for the life of me see what excellence you were after, when you threw away with both hands the kingdom that was yours by right, and betook yourself to the dark and dreary woods. Success crowns him who utilised his wealth to acquire virtue and realise his wishes. He who having thrown away his wealth, moves heaven and earth to acquire new wealth, but wastes his efforts. Nay, virtue and the fulfilment of desires are not the only outcome of well-spent wealth. Delight, satisfaction, pride, virtue, anger, self-control and peace all are lit up by wealth. The highest gain hereafter is not the only result of wealth; nay it brings to us every kind of happiness here also. And you have it not. Happiness comes not to those who slight wealth when it seeks them and follow *dharma* alone. Just as one does not see the sun and the planets, when the sky is covered with rain-clouds I do not see in you the wealth from which comes happiness. Behold the miseries that have befallen you who put away the kingdom that was the root of all good and greatness and followed obstinately the duty of carrying out the promise made by your father. She who is dearer to you than your very life, Janaki, has been carried away by the *rakshasas*. My valour and strength will today undo the evil that Indrajit has done to us. Best and bravest of the Raghus awake and arise. I will pay him in his own coin and chase away your sorrow. Why do you not remind yourself that you were omniscient Supreme. How can grief and confusion have any part in you? How could they arise in you? Soul of virtue! untouched by sin! Here am I, born to no other purpose than to carry out your least wishes and commands. I but follow you as your very shadow, with the sole hope of such service. The sight of Janaki, the beloved daughter of Janaka, the knower of Brahman, being put to death by this wicked Indrajit has filled me with anger. My shafts will make short work of Lanka, its armies and Ravana himself, my grief and anger that made me use the weapon of logic against *dharma* and *adharma*. Now I await your orders to put forth my strength and valour."

CHAPTER 84

HOW TO SLAY INDRAJIT

THUS, did Lakshmana, out of his boundless love for Rama seek to console and hearten him. (This suggests that the arguments put forward by Lakshmana were but the result of his brotherly love and not real). Vibhishana arrayed the army in appropriate positions and came to where Rama stood with his four ministers armed to the teeth following him even as an elephant-herd follows the leader. He saw Raghava sunk in the depths of grief and the monkeys gathered round him with streaming eyes. Raghuvira, the best and the noblest of the Ikshvakus, was confused in mind as he said to himself, "Alas! my foe has shattered all my hopes even when I am alive and caused me eternal grief and shame." This thought weighed him down and he lay with his head on the lap of Lakshmana. The sight broke Vibhishana's heart and plunged him into grief unspeakable; and he cried, "Wonder of wonders! how can this be?". Lakshmana noted the features of Vibhishana and glanced at Sugriva and the other monkeys; blinding tears choked his words as he told the *rakshasa* briefly what happened. "Hanuman told us that Sita was fully murdered by Indrajit; and from that moment he is even as you see him, clouded in his mind".

Vibhishana broke in and cried, "I guess the truth of all this. What Hanuman described to you so pathetically can never happen. The ocean must be dry and parched before this may come about. I know how the wicked heart of Ravana yearns towards Sita. He will never harm a hair of her head. I entreated him many times to restore her and he turned a deaf ear to all my words. Sweet words, gifts and separation from her own people all these have been powerless to tempt Sita. How can his mighty magic art and his brute force prevail against her. Indrajit has gone to the grove of Nikumbhila to perform a magic rite; to guard himself from interference he has thus thrown an illusion over the monkeys. Hence cast away from you this causeless grief; we should be there with our troops before he concludes the rite. The entire monkey-host looses heart when they see you grieving thus. Rest here and have no care. Send Lakshmana with the monkey-heroes. He will with his keen shafts, force Indrajit to come away from the rite ere it is finished. Then it would be easy thing to kill him. The feathered arrows of your brother shall drink the heart blood of the *rakshasa*. There is none in the whole of Lanka today who can meet us in fight after Indrajit is gone. When he is immersed in his rite, the monkeys will fall upon him and spoil it. And then will ring the hour of his doom, even according to the word of Brahma. As Indra hurls his thunderbolt, despatch Lakshmana this very moment to slay the *rakshasas* out of hand. Delay not; destroy your foe now. Command Lakshmana to slay Indrajit even as Indra orders the death of the leader of the *asuras*. But should Indrajit be allowed to complete his rite, he will vanish from sight beyond the reach of *devas* and *asuras*. And then all of them banded together cannot hope to stand against him.

CHAPTER 85

LAKSHMANA GOES FORTH TO BATTLE

RAGHUVIRA was confused of mind and could not at once grasp what Vibhishana meant. Then he took heart, turned to the *rakshasa* standing by and said, "Ruler of the *rakshasa*-world! I wish to hear once more if you please, your well-meant advice". Vibhishana answered, "Lord, I carried out your orders and arrayed our armies and placed them under the respective generals. I have to bring to your notice another important fact. Your causeless grief weighs heavily on the monkeys. So cast off your grief, put heart into us and bring down the pride of the *rakshasas*. Take unto yourself clearness of mind and resistless energy. For, should we not get back the lady Sita? Should we not destroy, root and branch, the wicked *rakshasas?* Listen then to my humble suggestion. Let Lakshmana go forth with his armies to Nikumbhila and slay in battle Indrajit before he completes his dreadful magic rite. Let him bend his redoubtable bow and draw the string to his ear; let his irresistible shafts, like unto the serpents of doom, cleave his heart and drink his life-breaths. He has won the heart of Brahma by his dreadful *tapas* and got from him the magic weapon, Brahmasiras, the car and the horses that takes him to wherever he wants to go. Now he has gone with his troops to Nikumbhila. Should he issue forth, with his magic rite completed, there is not the shadow of a doubt that our lives are in his hands. But Brahma has pronounced his words. He who would slay you on your course and fight you before you reach Nikumbhila, or before you complete your magic invocations will be the death of you". So his death has been foreordained thus. Send Lakshmana on this mission. Rest certain that the death of Indrajit means the end of Ravana himself and his hosts.

Thereat, Rama said unto his friend, "Full well do I know his magic might. He got from Brahma his *astra,* must be of rare intellect, powers of illusion and might of arms. It is easy for him to strike down the embattled array of the gods with their ruler at their head. Like unto the sun behind serried cloud-banks he ranges the skies in his car; and then no one can have a sight of his movements." Full well did he know the magic might of the foe. Lakshmana was a famous hero, doubtless, but he was about to fight no less a person than the wicked Indrajit. So he said to his brother, "Child! take with you the armies of Sugriva and of Jambavan; take also Maruti and other noble heroes to fight that *rakshasa* who is endowed with unparalleled powers of illusion. Vibhishana too has high intellectual powers, knows well the ways, habits and haunts of the *rakshasas*. He goes with you along with his ministers".

Lakshmana lost no time. He grasped his bow, donned his armour, fastened the quiver on his back and slung his sword at his side. Then he reverently touched the feet of Rama and said, "Brother, the shafts that go forth from my bow today shall cleave the heart of Indrajit and like the swans spreading over a lotus pool, cover the length and breadth of Lanka". He started on his mission blazing in heroic splendour. Rama clasped him fondly to his breast, gave him his blessing, spoke over him potent charms to keep away danger and harm from him on the field of battle and to ensure his safe return. Lakshmana, thereupon took his way to the battle-field with Vibhishana, his ministers, the monkey-hosts, Jambavan, Anjaneya and other heroes, until he came in sight of the armies of Indrajit. The magic might of Indrajit was known to him full well; so he took his stand at a place where he could fight with him before he entered Nikumbhila, even as Brahma has laid it down of old. He made his way into the *rakshasa*-force, dreadful to behold with his flags, banners, cars and weapons, himself brilliant like the sun piercing dense darkness.

CHAPTER 86

INDRAJIT BEGINS HIS FIGHT

THEN Vibhishana turned to Lakshmana and offered his advice conducive to the glory and well-being of Rama and Lakshmana and to the utter destruction of the *rakshasas.* "Let our monkeys make short work of these *rakshasas*, dark like rain-clouds. Chase them away and you will come upon the hiding place of Indrajit. Your shafts must lay them low before he completes the rite. Rid this earth of this wicked *rakshasas,* the enemy of *dharma,* the mighty magician, the monster of cruelty, who strikes terror into the hearts of all beings". Lakshmana lost no time. He bent his bow, strung it and covered Indrajit and his armies with a shower of arrows terrible as bolts from the blue. Bears and monkeys slew the *rakshasas* with boulders, trees, teeth and claws. The *rakshasas* cut and pierced the monkeys with arrows, swords, *sakti, tomara* and other weapons. The fight between the two armies was terrible to behold. Lanka shook to its foundations. The sky was hidden from him by arrows, trees and rocks. Indrajit came to know that *rakshasa*-force was being destroyed and put to flight by the bears and the monkeys, and thus he was obliged to come out before the rite was completed, in order to protect his followers. In mad fury he strode forth out of the dark grove. His eyes and face were red with anger. He ascended his car, black of hue like cloud-banks with the horses ready to start. His eyes and face red and distorted with fury. Waving his bow aloft he rushed at his foes like Yama intent upon the destruction of all creation. The *rakshasa*-warriors that were sunk in despair till now caught sight of him in his car and rallied back to give fight to Lakshmana. Then Anjaneya tore up a lofty tree, huge like a mountain and struck down the *rakshasas* in masses. At once thousands and thousands of *rakshasas* hit him on all sides with sharp tridents, *saktis,* swords, chills, wheels, spiked iron maces, iron bars, battle axes and the like as well as with fists and hands hard as thunderbolts. It enraged them more, when he crashed down the *rakshasas* about him even as a lordly elephant makes short work of tender plantain trees. Indrajit beheld with wonder the monkey-hero who worked havoc among his troops thus playfully without being in the least worse for it. He knew full well from of old, his prowess and strength. Anxiety seized his heart, and he said to his driver "Take my car to where that monkey is; if we are negligent now, our entire force will be destroyed." His orders were obeyed and Indrajit approached Maruti and hit him on the head with all his weapons at his command, but the son of Vayu broke them to bits and roared in fury. "You fool fight me fair and square, if you call yourself a hero. Know you not how your father fared at my hands? Do you stand up to me in battle and hope to return alive? Come, let us wrestle. If you can meet my attack I shall acclaim you, as the bravest of the *rakshasas*".

Then Indrajit bent his bow and placed arrows on the strings for slaying Hanuman. Vibhishana noticed it and warned Lakshmana, "This wicked *rakshasa* that vanquished Indra seeks to slay Maruti from his car. Cleave now his cart and drink his life-breaths; let your shafts be terrible indeed". Lakshmana said he would do it and beheld from afar that *rakshasa,* seated in his car, mountainous in bulk and roaring out frightfully.

CHAPTER 87

INDRAJIT AND VIBHISHANA

THEN Vibhishana took the mighty bowman, Lakshmana, and entering the grove pointed out to him the hall of sacrifice, his heart filled with joy. There he beheld a mighty banian tree black as a rain-cloud shutting from view the earth and the sky. Vibhishana said : "Indrajit proposes to offer sacrifice here to the elements to propitiate them and hopes to go forth invisible and fight unseen binding his foes with powerful arrows. Even before he comes here, your arrows must destroy him, his chariot, his horses and the driver".

Lakshmana, agreed and stood ready with bow bent and arrow fitted to the string. Meanwhile he saw the *rakshasa* seated covered with armour and bow in hand, his huge car blazing like fire and gaily decked with martial flags. Lakshmana hailed him and cried "Mighty hero of the Pulastya race! They say that you have never known defeat, I call you now to fight. Here is a chance to show your strength, skill and valour". Thereat Indrajit looked at Vibhishana standing near and cried insultingly, "You traitor! you were born here in Lanka, my father's brother, my own uncle! And yet, you dared to betray me, your son as it were. Nothing is precious to you neither kith nor kin neither friend nor clan; you have given up all restraint, respect, reverence and duty. Unfortunate wretch! I pity you. You are fated to turn your back on your own people and to serve the foes. Good men will spit upon you in disgust. Your mean mind does not see the difference between leading a happy peaceful life, among one's own people and hanging on low-bred strangers. Even if one's enemy is endowed with all excellences and one's own people are without them, it is nobler for me to stand loyal to one's kith and kin. A stranger is a stranger at the best. A traitor is exploited and treated well so long as he serves the stranger's purpose. But once he has helped to destroy his kin, the same fate overtakes him. You have spoiled my rite. You have brought Lakshmana here. This heartless cruelty is possible only for you, my kinsman".

And to him replied Vibhishana, "Why do you boast thus bravely as if you knew not my nature and life? Well, you are the first born of Ravana and inherit all his vices. Have some regard for me as uncle, and stop this rude talk. True, I was born a *rakshasa,* but I have no part in their cruel deeds and I have chosen to tread the path of virtue. My heart hates unrighteousness and cruel deeds. You blame me for turning my back on you. But why did your father pierce my heart with harsh words and drive me out of Lanka? Where then was his feeling of kinship and brotherly love? Further, my heart was filled with disgust by his evil deeds and I had to leave his side. Even as one casts away a serpent that binds itself round one's hand, I had to spurn him who had turned his back on *dharma* and was devoted to sinful deeds. How can one find happiness by injuring others, covetousness and abduction of women? As one flees from a house on fire, one should run far away from such an evil life. To lay one's hand on others' goods or others' women, and entertain unjust suspicion of one's friends, this is the shortest and the surest path to destruction. To slay a sage, to court the enmity of the gods, inordinate pride, anger, hate, envy of others' property — these sins throw all excellences into the shade even as cloud-banks blot out a mountain from view. My brother and your father, Ravana, is endowed with many a noble excellence; yet, I had to leave him, because of his vices. Death hangs over you, your father and indeed over all Lanka. You are a boy; you were born wicked; you never sat at the feet of holy men; you are puffed up with pride. The noose of death is round your neck and your end is near. Speak as your wicked heart impels you. You are in the grip of fate and yet you make fun of me. Well, try and come to this banian tree. You sought the enmity of Rama and Lakshmana and yet you hope to escape death. Now stand up against Lakshmana in fight; soon you will enter the halls of Yama and be his bondsman. Put forth your utmost might. Use your weapons and magic arts without stint. Give up all hope of escaping the arrows of Lakshmana and returning to Lanka.

CHAPTER 88

FIGHT BETWEEN LAKSHMANA AND INDRAJIT

INDRAJIT danced in mad fury at the words of Vibhishana. Like the God of Death, he sat in his car which was gaily decked and drawn by black horses. He looked carefully round at the swords, bows, arrows, and other weapons all placed within his easy reach. Turning his looks at the enemies' forces, he beheld Lakshmana, standing there before him in martial attire. Seated on the shoulders of Anjaneya, Lakshmana shone like the sun rising on the Eastern hill. (So Maruti was tawny and Lakshmana golden-hued like the sun). Then Indrajit turned to Vibhishana, Lakshmana, and the monkey-heroes and cried, "Behold my prowess this day. Famous heroes are you all, but my arrows will consume you to ashes like unto sparks of fire falling upon bales of cotton. I will cleave your limbs with the trident, sword and other weapons and despatch you to the halls of Yama. Like roaring rain-clouds, I will let loose on you a shower of arrows; then if there be any one bold enough among you let him stand agaist me. That night in battle with my arrows hard as *vajra*. I struck down Rama and Lakshmana who fell down in a faint . Have you so soon forgotten it? Or are you ready to a journey to the land of Yama? The hour of destruction is upon you, else you would never court a fight with me, hissing in fury like the serpent of doom''. Lakshmana laughed in disdain and said, ''You speak charmingly of things that you can never dream of doing. A man of sense speaks after, not before, doing mighty deeds. You will never achieve your purpose of defeating your foes. But you waste your time in vain talk, living in a fool's paradise. You are here on the battle-field; yet, you hide yourself from view and range the skies. This is the work of a thief, not a hero. Here I stand right before your arrows. Come and stand before me. Then I shall know your worth. Why chatter empty words?''

Thereat Indrajit grasped his bow and shot out arrows of cruel venom. Hissing like serpents of doom, they dived deep into the limbs of Lakshmana. Covered all over with blood, Lakshmana blazed in martial lustre and shone like a flame without smoke. Indrajit was glad of his own prowess and skill. Roaring like thunder he cried, ''My arrows shall this day torture you and drink up your life breaths; jackals, eagles and vultures will crowd round your corpse and eat your flesh. And wicked Rama will be a witness. Meanest of *kshatriyas!* base mortal! boundless is your devotion to Rama, is it not? This day will you roll on the ground, a headless corpse, with broken bow, and shattered armour; and verily he will stand by helpless''.

Lakshmana spoke in pregnant and reasoned words ''Oh, foolish and wicked one! you are valiant only in words, Put them away. You are always doing cruel deeds. These words are to no purpose. Let me judge of your might by your deeds. What is the use of speech without action? Let me behold your deeds if you would have me believe your boasts. Now, look here, I shall slay you out of hand without indulging in angry and haughty speech''. He drew the string to his ear and shot five sharp arrows at the enemy's heart. Like unto blazing serpents they buried themselves with resistless speed into the heart of Indrajit and shone like the rays of the sun. The *rakshasa* was but roused to greatest fury and hit Lakshmana with three arrows that did not miss their mark.

Then they fought a terrible battle, each keen on vanquishing the other. Unequalled in strength and skill, the two heroes fought with each other like two huge planets in the sky. Fearless like Indra and Vritra of old, firm and irresistible, they fought like two lordly lions. They kept up a ceaseless downpour of arrows without stay or stint. They roared like huge cloud-banks and hid each other under a deluge of arrows. Even as Indra and the *asura* Sambara fought in ancient days the two valiant heroes with increasing fury and energy, displayed their martial training and skill.

CHAPTER 89

FIGHT BETWEEN INDRAJIT AND LAKSHMANA — *(Continued)*

THEN Lakshmana hissing with fury like a lordly serpent despatched a powerful arrow at his foe. The *rakshasa* was taken aback at the sound of the twang and his face turned pale as he gazed on Lakshmana. Vibhishana who noted his pallor and the martial ardour that filled Lakshmana, cried "I see many signs that this foe of yours is tired and weak. Rush forward now and slay him speedily".

And Lakshmana lost no time in fitting to his string flame-like arrows and despatching them against Indrajit. He was dazed, his senses were confused; and like a man struck with a thunderbolt he sat there for the space of a *muhurta* knowing not what to do. But, unshaken in fortitude he recovered soon. His eyes fell upon Lakshmana who stood before him shouting for very joy; his eyes were blood-shot and he cried, 'Have you so soon forgotten the lesson that I taught you in the first fight between us, when you and your brother writhed in agony on the ground? Have you yet no idea of my prowess? Call back to your mind how you and your monkey-hosts were struck down senseless by my arrows, mighty and as thunderbolts. Or have you chosen a short cut to the halls of Yama? Have you come here to fight me yearning to go there? I thought you had come to your senses, having had some idea of my valour and martial skill. If you have forgotten, I shall refresh your memory today. Stay fight carefully." And therewith he hit Lakshmana with seven arrows, Anjaneya with ten, and Vibhishana with many more, since he had revealed his secrets.

But Lakshmana laughed lightly saying to himself, This is but child's play". He despatched arrows of frightful might as he cried, "*Rakshasa*! I have never seen a warrior behave on the field as you do. Those intent upon victory will not shoot such puny shafts. Your arrows hurt me not in the least. Why, they are very pleasant and agreeable." And he followed the words with another deluge of arrows. The golden armour of Indrajit was riven thereby, and it was scattered over the ground, even as stars falling from the sky. His body was riddled with *narachas* which looked like trees hiding a mountain from view. Beside himself with fury, he shot a thousand arrows at Lakshmana; and broke into splinters his divine armour.

Thus did they exchange warlike compliments. They breathed hard, their bodies bristled with arrows and torrents of blood coursed down them, as they pierced and cut each other with sharp shafts. Veterans of thousand battles, of frightful valour, intent upon the death of each other the two shot through and through with arrows. With shattered armour and drenched in blood that flowed like mountain torrents, roaring loud enough to terrify the hearts of all, they looked like black thunder-clouds from which there fell a ceaseless shower of arrows. Long did they fight thus and yet they knew neither fatigue nor a weakening or ardour. They used many weapons and magic instruments and covered the earth and the sky with a canopy of arrows. None excelled them in the art of magic weapons; they kept it up tirelessly, ceaselessly, skilfully, and with wonderful lightness of hand and keenness of eye, never once failed to hit the mark; verily it was a battle that was terrible to behold. Like unto bolts from the blue, the twang of their bows fell upon the ears of every one, like clouds roaring in exuberance; the earth and the sky echoed to their war-like roars, and terrible bursts of laughter. Keenly intent on each other their bodies shone all over with *narachas* decked with golden bands from which torrents of blood rushed forth. The shafts passed through them and buried themselves in the earth smeared with blood. Some of the arrows clashed against one another in the sky. Some broke or cut down their opponents. Like unto bundles of sacred grass burnt to ashes by the flaming *Garhapatya* and *Ahavaniya* fires, their arrows burst into flames. Their bodies, covered with dreadful wounds, resembled the *salmali* and the *kimsuka* trees, leafless but covered with red blossoms.

They vowed to slay each other and fought long and dreadfully.Though they ceased not,yet,they felt not the slightest touch of fatigue.Arrows were imbedded in their bodies and made them look like mountains paved with thick woods.Hidden by arrows, drenched with blood,their limbs resembled fires surrounded by lambent flames. Thus they fought on long and skilfully. Yet their martial ardour was not quenched and their arms were not weary. Then approaching Lakshmana who was fighting with unshaken courage and uncontrollable energy, Vibhishana came near and spoke to him sweet words of love and comfort.

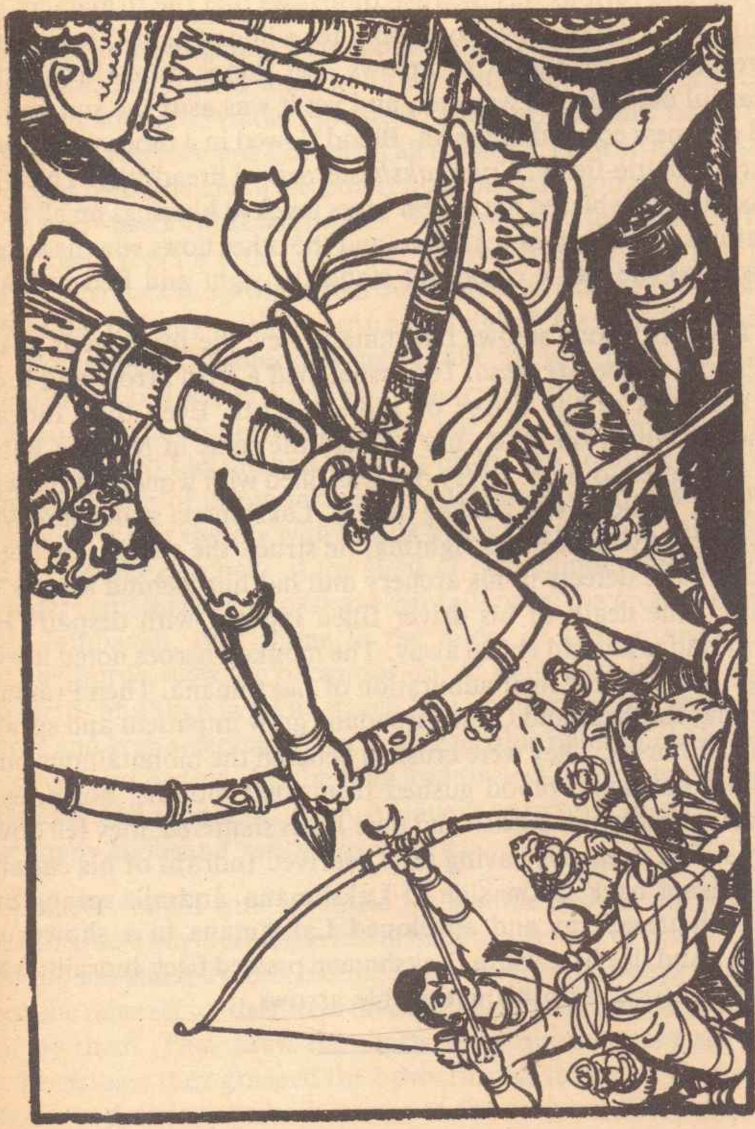
CHAPTER 90

INDRAJIT LOSES HIS CAR

LIKE two lordly elephants in rut, each intent on slaying the other, they fought with mounting fury. Beholding this, Vibhishana spread terror among the *rakshasas* by his keen arrows. Even as the *vajra* of Indra clove the mountain and cut off their wings, they clove the bodies of the *rakshasas*. His ministers were busy cutting down the *rakshasa*-heroes with such weapons as swords and tridents. Surrounded by his ministers, looked like a lordly elephant-leader surrounded by elephants in ruts. (He came there as a spectator; then he wanted to take part in the fight. Yet he held back for a while, unable to decide which of the two warriors was stronger. Seeing that they were well-balanced he wanted to be of service to Rama and joined the fight). Ready-witted and skilful of speech, the *rakshasa*-prince, knew that it was time for him to put heart into the monkey-heroes and he cried "Friends! Ravana has no one else to lean on but this *rakshasa;* nor has he another army to send up. Then why stay your hands? If he should die, take it that all the *rakshasa*-warriors are all dead and gone, except Ravana. Prahasta, Nikumbha, Kumbha, Kumbhakarna, Dhumraksha, Samhradi, Vikata, Nighna, Tapana, Adhuma, Praghasa, Jangha, Prajangha, Agniketu, Rasmiketu, Vidyujjihva, Dvijihva, Suryasatru, Akampana, Suparsva, Chakramali, Jambumali, Mahamali, Agniprabha, Suptaghna, Yajnakopa, Vajradamshtra, Kampana, Devantaka, Narantaka and the others, are they of the ordinary crowd? In strength, valour, prowess, and warlike skill, have they their equal? Have we not slain them all in battle? He who has crossed the ocean, with the aid of his powerful arms, can he not mind walk over a hoof-mark filled with water. And we have slain them in fair fight. There remain none but these for you to fight with and put to rout. The *rakshasas* who came out against us with hearts swollen with pride, did any of them return to Lanka? He is my brother's son and as such it ill-becomes me to take his life. Even if for the sake of my Lord Rama I put away mercy from my heart and am ready to slay the son of my brother, hot tears blind my eyes. Let the mighty hero Lakshmana curb his pride. His followers will fall under the hands of our monkeys". Thus heartened by Vibhishana, the monkeys rent the sky with shouts of joy, waved their tails aloft, and crying like peacocks at the sight of rain-clouds, slapped their shoulders and thighs and dashed their tails upon the ground in mad fury. Jambavan, that shone in the midst of that group of the monkey-horde, slew the *rakshasas* out of hand with blocks, claws and teeth; and they in turn, struck him on all sides fearlessly with arrows and keen weapons. Even like the terrible fights of old between the *devas* and *asuras,* did the long and tireless battle rage between *rakshasas* and monkeys. Then Anjaneya tore up a huge tree and slew many thousand *rakshasas* with it.

Indrajit fought with his uncle for a while and turned towards Lakshmana. They were clean hid behind the shower of arrows. Like unto the sun and the moon blotted from view behind banks of clouds when the rains set in, they were invisible behind the canopy of arrows shot by them. They drew the shafts from quivers; they set them on the strings; they grasped the bows firmly; they shot the arrows therefrom drawing the bow-strings to the very ear. Fine was their foot work, right and left, front and back. They took careful aim. But all this was utterly beyond the sight of the spectators, so quick were their movements. The sky was hid from view by the arrowy showers; one could not make out another in the darkness. It was impossible to say whether Lakshmana hit Indrajit or the other way. So fast and furious was the rush of arrows that the firmament was one sheet of darkness without room for a line of light. The quarters were blocked by flights of arrows. All things were shrouded in dreadful darkness. It was day, and yet it was as if the sun had set and darkness covered the earth. Blood flowed in a thousand streams over the battle-fields. Cruel *rakshasas* roared dreadfully. The wind stood still. Fire blazed not. Great sages invoked blessings on all living creatures. *Gandharvas, charanas* and the other hosts who had come to witness the battle could not stand the sight and fled in fear.

Then with four arrows Lakshmana slew the four steeds yoked to the car of the *rakshasa.* He despatched a fifth arrow and it cut off the head of the driver of Indrajit's car. Even then Indrajit blenched not in the least, but he held the reins in his own hands and continued to fight. Every one was filled with wonder at his warlike skill. While he was guiding the car, Lakshmana struck him with arrows; and while he was fighting, he struck the steeds. He noted carefully the defects in his archery and hid him behind a bank of arrows. The death of his driver filled Indrajit with despair. His energy and pride had ebbed away. The monkey-heroes noted it with delight and shouted their admiration of Lakshmana. Then Pramati, Sarabha, Rabhasa and Gandhamadana grew impatient and sprang upon the horses. They were crushed beneath the mountainous bulk of those monkeys; blood gushed from their mouths, noses, eyes and ears; their bones broken and their limbs shattered, they fell down lifeless. The monkeys having thus deprived Indrajit of his car and horses leapt back to the side of Lakshmana. Indrajit sprang out of his shattered car and enveloped Lakshmana in a shower of arrows. And like Mahendra, Lakshmana pressed back Indrajit, who fought on foot, with his irresistible arrows.



CHAPTER 91

THE SLAYING OF INDRAJIT

HIS horses having been killed, Indrajit fought on foot. He was beside himself with wrath and blazed like fire. The heroes, redoubtable bowmen as they were, fought like two elephants or bulls in the forest each intent upon worsting the other and their followers went with them wherever they went, unable to take their eyes off from the heroes. Then Indrajit praised his men and cheered them up, "Friends, in this darkness, we cannot make out friend or foe. I will cover with a cloud the minds of the monkeys and slip away. Keep fighting, so that they might not notice my absence. I shall go and fetch another car. No one should know of my visit to Lanka. Be careful". Saying this he left the field and soon came back in another car decked with gold; and in it was carefully arranged every warlike instrument. Mighty steeds were yoked to it, and the driver was devoted to him, and ever ready with fruitful advice. There was nothing that he did not know about horses, being a master of the mysteries of their heart. (The nature, the quality and ways of horses form a separate branch of knowledge which enables one to utilise them in any way he likes).

Seeing Indrajit come back upon another car, the monkeys and Vibhishana were mightily surprised and lauded his intelligence and agility. The *rakshasa* consumed as it were the monkey-generals in the fire of his wrath and pierced them with hundreds and thousands of arrows. He bent his bow in a circle and set up an arrowy wall which prevented the monkeys from taking to their heels and turned their steps towards the world of death. Despite their prowess they now lost heart and sought shelter with Lakshmana even as all created beings seek shelter with Brahma. In his turn, Lakshmana blazed in the radiance of his martial ardour and displayed his skill and agility by breaking the bow of Indrajit. In an instant Indrajit strung another bow, but Lakshmana cut it with three arrows and pierced his body with five arrows. They passed clean through him and entered the earth like huge serpents fiery red. Indrajit had his armour riven to bits; he vomited gouts of blood; yet he eased himself in another armour, took up a fresh bow firmly strung and kept up most skilfully a never ceasing stream of arrows, even like Indra sending down fierce rain. But Lakshmana blenched not and displayed his deftness by keeping the shower away from him; and all wondered thereat. Then he uttered a charm that increased the speed of the arrows and hit each of his foes with three arrows and their leader himself with many more. The *rakshasa* thus harassed by the mighty Lakshmana, struck back at him with many a shaft which the prince cut down before they reached him. Lakshmana wound it up by cutting off the head of the driver with a keen shaft *(Bhalla)* and made it fall at the feet of his master. Being perfectly trained the horses pulled the car as usual and displayed many curves and steps in their courses none the worse for the absence of their driver. This enraged Lakshmana who made them tremble with many a shaft. Indrajit in his turn blazed with wrath and sent ten arrows against Lakshmana. They fell upon him like the *vajra* of Indra and shattered his armour. He donned another; whereat Indrajit said to himself "There is no breaking this", and he showed his skill by striking the prince on his forehead with three arrows. Lakshmana shone like a mountain with three lofty peaks. It pained him sore and he hit back Indrajit on his face with five keen shafts. They were both heroes armed with strong and matchless bows. Their prowess put terror into the hearts of others. They struck each other ceaselessly with sharp arrows. Their limbs drenched in blood looked like *kimsuka* trees in full bloom. Each intent on defeating his foe, neither left in the other's body any space untouched by arrows. Then Indrajit in mad fury struck Vibhishana's face with three arrows. He clove the monkey-leaders with one arrow each. Thereat Vibhishana brought his club down on the horses of Indrajit and killed them. Then Indrajit leapt down lightly from his car and whirled the weapon *sakti* and sent it against Vibhishana, his uncle; but Lakshmana cut it down into ten pieces with his keen arrow. Vibhishana hit the son of Ravana on his broad chest with five arrows hard like *vajra*. They passed through his body and came out like serpents fiery red.

Then the *rakshasa* resolved to slay his uncle, took up an arrow given him of old by Maya with his blessings. Lakshmana saw him place it on the string and took up an arrow presented to him in his dream by Kubera. It was impossible for anyone to foil it. Indra or the *devas* and the *asuras* combined could not stand against it. The combatants endowed with boundless strength drew their bows to their ears with their arms, hard and strong, like the weapon *parigha* and the twang was like the cry of the Krauncha bird. The two shafts deftly placed upon the strings most shone with boundless lustre. Shot from their bows they dashed against each other in the sky and fell on the earth like two mighty planets crashing into dust and ashes; The impact resulted in a terrible blaze of fire mixed with smoke. The sight filled the warriors with anger and shame. Lakshmana, beside himself with wrath shot the *astra* of the Lord Varuna, and Indrajit met it with the *astra* of Rudra. Then Indrajit sped the *astra* of the Lord of Fire, fierce enough to consume all creations, but Lakshmana with the *astra* of the Lord of Day quenched its spirit and fire. Then the son of Ravana bent on the destruction of his foe, sent against him the *astra* of the *asuras;* and from it blazing tridents, chills, swords, battle axes and iron bars emerged. That *astra* which none could stem and which could destroy all foes was rendered useless by the *astra* of Mahesvara that was shot by Lakshmana of mighty radiance. The denizens of the sky ranged themselves round Lakshmana as the combatants fought with gruesome fierceness. Hosts of the heaven-world gathered to witness the struggle while the monkeys and *rakshasas* fought with dreadful shouts and cries. The *rishis,* the *pitrus,* the gods, the *gandharvas* and *uragas* with Indra at their head, showered blessings on Lakshmana. They encouraged him and extended their protection over him. Then Lakshmana placed another arrow upon the string. It was the mighty *astra* of Indra himself. It was like unto the God of Fire capable of consuming all creation. Adorned with beautiful eagle feathers, endowed with every excellence that an *astra* could have, worked over most skilfully with gold patterns, it was capable of destroying the bodies of its foes. None could stay it. None could stand its force. The heart of the *rakshasas* quaked at the very sight of it. It was charged with venom like the serpent of Time; the hosts of heaven held it in reverence. With its help Indra in the far past, defeated the *danavas* in the great fight between the *devas* and the *asuras*. That *astra* of Indra, that knew no defeat till then, did Lakshmana, the best and bravest of men, fit into his mighty bow;

he drew the string to the ear, as he blazed in his wrath even like unto the God of Death that destroys the worlds and he uttered words of wondrous might to accomplish his purpose. "If it is true that Sri Rama has come down as the son of Dasaratha, if it is true that Rama is the very embodiment of *dharma,* if it is true that Rama never goes back upon truth, and if it is equally true that he is matchless in prowess then Oh! *astra* of Indra! slay this Indrajit, the son of Ravana, that stands before me". He then spoke the spells pertaining to the *astra* of Indra, set it on the string and shot it with the intent of slaying Indrajit. It failed not, it severed the head of Indrajit with its head-dress, crown, ear-rings and other ornaments and flung it on the ground. As the huge head of Indrajit lay on the ground with the blood gushing out in torrents it looked as if it were fashioned of gold. Thus did the son of Ravana meet his death at the hands of Lakshmana. His bow was broken and his armour cloven and he died in warlike array. Even as the gods rejoiced when the *asura* Vritra was slain by Indra, the entire host of monkeys and Vibhishana revelled in joy and rent the skies with shouts of victory. On high, gods and *rishis, gandharvas* and *apsarasas,* lauded the hero Lakshmana. Indrajit was dead; and the victorious monkeys put to rout and scattered in all directions his armies lightly. They were senseless with fear and raced towards Lanka casting away their weapons. Some took refuge in the city itself. Some flung themselves into the sea, some ran up the heights of mountains. When Indrajit, the mighty hero lay dead on the battle-field, none of the many thousands of the *rakshasas,* who had been there, could now be seen. Even as the sun vanishes from view when it sets, his troops sought shelter all over the land now that their master was no more. And he measured his length on the earth, a headless corpse, with his limbs sprawling like the sun bereft of his rays, or a fire quenched. The death of the *rakshasa*-prince lifted the weight of sorrow and misery that lay heavy on the world; and it shone once more in the utter fearlessness of any foe. The Lord of Day himself whose lustre was dimmed through fear of the *rakshasas,* shone in the fullness of splendour. Indra and the *deva*-hosts were beside themselves with joy now that the monster of wickedness had been destroyed. The gods beat the drums of heaven. The *apsarasas* danced in high glee. The *gandharvas* sang melodiously. The hosts of heaven rained flowers upon Lakshmana and lauded him variously.

The waters and the quarters shorn clear and stainless, since he, who held the worlds in abject terror, was dead. All rejoicing, — the *devas,* the *gandharvas* and the *danavas* gathered together and cried "Now indeed may the brahmins go about without fear or anxiety", Vibhishana, Hanuman, Jambavan and the other monkey-lords cried, "Lakshmana! victory, to thee, for ever," and they could not praise him enough. The monkeys gathered around him and roared ceaselessly. They slapped their shoulders, brandished aloft their tails and brought them down against the earth. They sang their deeds of valour; they embraced one another in the fullness of joy. They kept up a perpetual roar, "May your arms be ever crowned with success". The dear friends of Lakshmana, the very gods on high, were delighted beyond measure by his wonderful exploit which others can never dream of accomplishing. (The news was spread by the *charanas,* but they could not believe it. What they heard was incredible and they came to the field to assure themselves of the truth of it. And the sight which met their eyes struck them with amazement).

CHAPTER 92

RAMA PRAISES LAKSHMANA

LAKSHMANA, drenched with blood and pierced with arrows, was highly pleased at laying low the mighty Indrajit who had vanquished Indra, the king of the gods, and had held him captive. Then he went towards the place where Raghava and Sugriva were. Jambavan and Hanuman helped him as he was fatigued. And the other monkeys followed them. He prostrated himself at the feet of Raghuvira, gave out his name and ancestry and like Brihaspati by the side of Indra, standing by the side of his brother narrated the events of the day — how he fought a dreadful fight with Indrajit and slew him. He faltered in his speech through fatigue, as it were. (In fact Lakshmana was a stranger to pain or weariness. He had to play his part in the world and that is why Valmiki says 'as it were'). But Vibhishana was not content with this short narration of Lakshmana and repeated the tale in greater detail. Raghunatha of boundless might was beside himself with delight when he heard of the death of Indrajit at the hands of Lakshmana. "Lakshmana! Excellent! well have you done the work that had to be done. Boundless is my joy. Indrajit dead, the destruction of all our foes is certain". He smelt the crown of his head; but Lakshmana withdrew and stood apart ashamed that his valiant brother, the prince of heroes, should make much of a trifle and praise him out of measure. Raghunatha drew to himself his dear brother riddled with shafts, made him sit on his lap, and clasped him fondly to his breast and gazed at him long and lovingly. Noting that the boy was wounded all over with arrows, that his body was bathed in blood and he was breathing hard through fatigue, Raghunatha was deeply grieved and sighed heavily deep sighs in his turn. Then he smelt his head again, passed his hands over his body and consoled the prince "Boy you perform deeds of valour impossible for others; and you have this day wrought a deed that none have dared, to dream of till now and that has brought happiness and safety to all the worlds. You cut off the right hand of Ravana. The cruel *rakshasa,* Indrajit, was his sole stay and support. Vibhishana and Hanuman too have done mighty deeds in battle today. You all fought hard with that *rakshasa*-hero unceasingly for three days — on the eleventh, twelfth and the thirteenth days of the fortnight. Today I can boldly say that my foes are no more. When Ravana hears the death of his son he will come out against me with all his forces, unconquered till now. He will rush forth to battle, maddened with grief at the death of his son. I will hem him round with our monkey-hosts. I will slay him out of hand. What do I lack so long as you are by my side to carry out my wishes? You have slain him who had vanquished the mighty Indra himself. I hold already in my hands Sita and this earth".

He praised his brother in noble words and clasped him again to his breast. Then he turned to Sushena and said "You are skilful and wise. My dear brother is sore wounded with arrows; free him from pain and make him whole again. Vibhishana and the other monkey-heroes too are grievously hurt with arrows and weapons. It is up to you to give them back their strength and valour". So Sushena made Lakshmana inhale potent drugs. The arrows that had entered his body slipped out themselves. Pain fell away from him and his wounds were healed. Vibhishana and the other monkeys were properly attended to. Lakshmana was his own self again, strong, healthy, and cheerful. Rama, Sugriva, and Vibhishana rejoiced thereat. Rama could not praise enough the wonderful feat of Lakshmana that day. And the monkey-lords too danced with joy at the news of the death of Indrajit.

CHAPTER 93

A FATHER'S GRIEF

HIS ministers brought Ravana news of the death of Indrajit in battle, after they had assured themselves of the truth of it personally. (Ravana had strong doubts about the safety of Indrajit even when he knew that the sacrifice in the Nikumbhila grove was interrupted). "Your Majesty! your son, dear to your heart beyond measure, Indrajit, unparalleled in radiance and splendour, him has Lakshmana slain in battle this day, thanks to the counsel and help of Vibhishana. A mighty warrior was he, our prince; defeat was a thing unknown to him till now. He worsted Indra, and bound him in chains; and he was a worthy son of your majesty in every way. He fought long and hard with a foeman equal to him in every respect. Lakshmana had a very dreadful time of it; but at last, Indrajit fell before the *astra* of his enemy and is now enthroned in the worlds above."

The words of his ministers, conveying the terrible news of the death of Indrajit in battle, wrung from him a terrible cry, 'Ha and he fell down in a swoon, like an uprooted tree. After a long time he came back to his senses. Yet he was dazed and lamented piteously. "Alas! the joy of my heart! the light of my eyes! matchless hero! best and bravest of our race! Victor over Mahendra, the ruler of the gods! and was it so fated that you should lose your life at the hands of Lakshmana? Your arrows winged with wrath used to cleave the lord of Death and the peaks of mount Mandara. This Lakshmana, what is he before you? Now for the first time, I respect Yama now that you are in his power. They say that the halls of the heaven-world are open to him, who gives up his life in the service of his master. Warriors on earth and gods above pray eagerly for such an end. Hence I should not grieve because you have won the heaven of noble warriors. This day will bring to the gods, the rulers of earth and the *rishis* deep and happy slumber now that they have heard the news of the death of Indrajit. But, alas for me , the world is empty now, these three worlds, are all empty, this earth and its mountains and forests. My Indrajit, the soul of my soul is no more. The lamentation of your wives in their palaces will pierce my ears and heart like the cries of elephants in mountain caves over their lost lord and mate. This *rakshasa*-kingdom, boundless and peerless, was yours, you were the heir apparent to it; this Lanka, these *rakshasas,* your mother Mandodari, your beloved queen and myself, your fond father, all these you have left behind and betaken yourself where I know not. It would be in the fitness of things that I should precede you to the halls of death. You should perform my funeral rites. But you are dead and I am left to perform your obsequies. Strange verily are the ways of Fate. Rama, Lakshmana, Sugriva, and the other monkeys are alive and hearty. You have not fulfilled my vow, you have not avenged me. You have left us all helpless and you have gone where I know not''. Thus and in many ways did the matchless Lord of Lanka, grieve.

Ravana was by his nature furious; grief at the death of his son heightened his anger beyond measure; and he shone like the sun that blazed forth on a scorching summer day. He knit his brows and looked like the huge billows that team with monsters on the day of dissolution. Even like the *asura* Vritra of old, he belched out smoke and flames. The *rakshasa*-hero overwhelmed by grief and anger took counsel with himself and concluded that it was best for him to slay Janaki. His eyes of fiery red grew redder yet with wrath and blazed more dreadfully terrible to behold. He swooned as it were with the fire of his wrath and none dared look at his face blazing like Rudra's, in the height of his fury. From his eyes fell not tears but burning flames and boiling oil. He ground his teeth and the noice was like that of countless mills driven furiously by the *danavas* pouring into them huge heaps of sesamum. Wherever he turned in his fury, like the fire of universal dissolution, the *rakshasas* quaked with terror and vanished from view. None dared to come within the range of his sight, as he stared round in his anger, as if he would swallow all creations, animate and inanimate.

He noted that his troops and followers were terror-struck and had no heart for fighting. Hence he spoke to them words of cheer and encouragement. "Thousands of years have I spent in stern austerities and at the end of every millennium, I have pleased the heart of Lord Brahma. Thanks to the might of my *tapasya* and to the grace of the grand sire, I have nothing to fear from the *devas* and *asuras*. Brahma has given me an armour of gold, brilliant like the noonday sun. It was proof against *vajras* and *saktis,* when I fought with the *devas* and *asuras*. And who can stand against me when, wearing this armour, I enter the field in my car? The very lord of the gods, Indra himself, armed with his *vajra,* dare not face me. And I have the bow and arrows, that I won from Lord Brahma through my *tapas*. With these very weapons, I defeated the gods and the *asuras* in times past. And today I shall take them out to the sound of martial instruments, and send forth to slay Rama and Lakshmana".

The *rakshasa*-hero, beside himself with grief and wrath at the death of his son, took counsel with himself and decided that it was good for him to slay Sita. With bloodshot eyes and dreadful looks and aching heart, he glanced at the *rakshasas* round him and cried, piteously "Friends! my boy intended to deceive Rama and Lakshmana and he slew before their eyes a Sita fashioned by magic. Today I shall really and truly kill her. Yes! I shall torture and slay Janaki, she who leans for support upon those puny *kshatriyas;* and so find some relief for my grief and anger. Even thus he thundered; and then he drew his sword keen and shining with undimmed lustre, like unto a fiery black serpent, and his senses distracted with wrath, he took his way to where Sita was, his ministers and wives following him. The *rakshasas* were highly pleased thereat; they fell upon one another's shoulders and roared for very joy. "This day surely Rama and Lakshmana will die at the mere sight of our Lord and Master. Has he not struck down in his wrath the regents of the four quarters and every foe that came in his way? He is the only one who brings home and enjoys the best of objects in all the three worlds. He has no peer in strength and prowess". Meanwhile Ravana ran towards where Sita was in the *asoka* grove. Like the planet Mars rushing forth to clutch the star Rohini, the Lord of Lanka, intent upon slaying Sita, rushed out despite all that his well-meaning friends could do to stop him.

Guarded most carefully by *rakshasa*-women, Sita saw Ravana rushing towards her with drawn sword and angry looks and his many friends running after him to turn him from his course. Greatly grieved, she cried. "Alas! this wretch is upon me with drawn sword and wild with fury, I cannot escape death at his hands. Helpless am I, even though the mighty warriors, Rama and Lakshmana, are there to protect me. Many times this monster entreated me to be his wife and enjoy the pleasures of this world with him. But I whose thoughts dwelt for ever on the lord of my heart, paid no heed to his words and dismissed him with insults. So he has given up of all hope of winning me over. "What is not to be mine shall be for no one else." — This thought drives him on to slay me in his anger and grief. Could it be that those lords of men, Rama and Lakshmana, fought with him for me, and met their death at his hands? Fie upon me, whose black sin has brought them to their death, or could it be that this cruel *rakshasa* seeks to vent his wrath upon me, since he cannot prevail against Rama and Lakshmana and grief for the loss of his son has made him mad? Alas! Why did I reject the well-meant advice of Anjaneya, fool that I was? If I had allowed him to carry me on his back I should, by now, be sitting in happiness on the lap of my husband. And I would not face this horror. The lady Kausalya has no other son than Rama; he is her only stay and support; and if she heard that Raghuvira had fallen in battle, she would die of a broken heart. Most piteously would she cry and grieve, dwelling on his glorious birth, his boyhood and youth, his noble conduct and virtue and his strong championship of truth. She would lament the perversity of fate that makes her perform the funeral rites of her son; and abandoning hopes of comfort and happiness and in utter confusion and madness, she would leap into the blazing fire or into deep waters, and so meet her end. And that Manthara deserves richly the direct fate that could be devised; she who was at the root of all this misery. The wicked hunchback should be burnt alive!" Like the lady Rohini in the cruel grip of the planet Mars, and far away from her Lord, the Moon, did the lady Sita grieve and lament piteously.

Ravana caught sight of her and rushed towards her like a whirlwind. One of his ministers, Suparsva by name, of keen intellect and noble character, was highly resourceful. He addressed himself to Ravana, who ran along like a mad elephant that none could stop, and said, "Your Majesty! This is strange indeed! You have won for yourself the unique name of Dasagriva, (He hints that one with ten heads should have ten times the wisdom of an ordinary man). You are the brother of Kubera, the Lord of the quarters; and he is the good friend of the Lord Paramasiva, your chosen deity. Forgetting all this and forgetting too your ancestry, your name and fame, your wisdom and virtue, why do you seek the murdering of a woman? Why yield thus to rage? Your mind was ever inclined towards the study of the *Vedas,* the arts and sciences, observances,purificatory baths and the discharge of prescribed duties. What drives you now to the foul murder of a woman? Does this act become you, the Lord of the *rakshasa*-world, who should set an example to others of righteous conduct? Be sure that the lady Sita, of matchless beauty, will come to your side in good time. You and we, your followers, we should now turn our wrath against that Rama. This is the fourteenth day of the dark fortnight. I pray you go forth to battle now. Surrounded by your armies issue from the gates of Lanka on the new moon day. Who in the worlds above and below, can approach you in valour and judgment? Cased in shining armour, equipped with mighty weapons and seated in your wondrous car, go forth to the battle-field; bend your bow, destroy Rama and Lakshmana. Then the lady Sita is yours to enjoy as you like".

The words of Suparsva, virtuous and expedient, found favour with Ravana. He turned his back upon the *asoka* grove and took his way to the audience hall and took counsel with his friends on the steps to be taken.

CHAPTER 94

THE MULABALA

RAVANA came to the hall of audience and even in his grief and dejection seated himself on the throne like an angry he-lion. He sought counsel with himself for a long time. Weak with sorrow and with his body wan and faded, that left him pale, he turned to his generals and said with folded hands of request, "Every one of you must now go forth into the battle-field, surrouned by your troops, horses and chariots, elephants and foot soldiers. Let Rama and Rama alone be your quarry. Hack him to pieces with your weapons which should descend on him like thick rain from monsoon clouds. If you fail, I myself shall deal the death-blow to him as he lies there in the presence of you all, his body riddled with your arrows". Thus commanded, the *rakshasas* drove to the battle-field in mountain-like chariots, and on mighty elephants, and horses. (It is not a fault that he requested them. He was indeed the ruler of the *rakshasas* but his prayer added drilling force to his words).

With bolt, broadsword, axe, rapier and other weapons the *rakshasas* attacked the monkeys; and they returned the blows by bringing down upon the *rakshasas* huge trees, and mountain crags. From bright dawn to sunset did that dreadful battle rage between them. Neither the *rakshasas* nor the monkeys would stay their hands or draw back an inch. Red dust rose high and hid the troops from view. But soon torrents of blood like mountain streams brought down the dust. Elephants and chariots were the two banks of the roaring flood; the horses disported themselves in it; flags and pennons were the trees that lined the banks; the crowding carcasses were the rafts that crossed the stream. The monkeys, wet with this torrent, leapt here and there and broke the flags, armour, chariots and horses of the *rakshasas*. They tore with claws and bit with teeth the head and hair, the ears and noses of their enemies. As a huge tree, bends down under the weight of innumerable birds, one *rakshasa* was borne down by hundreds of monkey-heroes. The *rakshasas,* mighty like mountains, dealt out death among the monkeys with chills, swords, axes, spears, javelins and other weapons. Sore beset by those night-rangers,the monkeys sought refuge with Rama in whose shadow the worlds rest in peace. Raghunatha grasped his mighty bow, bent and strung it, and pierced the hearts of the huge *rakshasas,* so that they dared not draw near him. How could the clouds come near the noon-day sun in all his glory? The *rakshasas* were dazed and terror-struck by the wondrous deeds of valour wrought by Rama. In fact they could not raise their eyes and behold Sri Rama who put to rout the boundless *rakshasa*-host and burnt down their most redoubtable car-warriors. Can any one set eyes on the tornado that brings crashing down the tall trees of the forest? Its work of destruction is all that we see. The *rakshasas* were cloven in their limbs; they were maimed and torn; they were scorched by the fire of arrows; their bones were broken; they lay dying and dead. But none could catch a glimpse of Rama who moved in their midst, fast and furious. Have we ever set eyes on the soul that animate our bodies, fashioned of the five elements? We infer its presence by the experience of the five senses. Even so only the *rakshasas* felt arrows of Rama striking them, but himself, they could not see.

"It is he that strikes down the elephants; it is he that shatters the cars; it is he that slays the horses; it is he that slaughters our soldiers". Thus, each *rakshasa* mistook another for Rama and they killed one another. It was all the work of the *gandharva astra,* shot by the mighty warrior. Hence they could not catch a glimpse of Rama, who made short work of their forces. Now, they beheld him everywhere;there were thousands of Rama on the battle-field, bow in hand. The *rakshasas* took the forms of Rama himself. It was but the abject terror of the *rakshasas* and not the magic power of the *astra* that made them mistake one another for Rama. "Ravana! my fear grows upon me and I behold thousands of Ramas wherever I turn my eyes". These were the very words of Maricha. Rama faced his foes on all sides, whirling round and shooting deadly shafts. Only the tip of his gold-decked *kodanda* was visible to the *rakshasas.* They saw a burning wheel of fire as Raghuvira sped round with the speed of thought. When a boy whirls round a glowing brand, what meets the eye is but a blazing circle of light. Rama, facing his foes on all sides with incredible speed, gave one the appearance of being everywhere only the tip of his bow was visible and not himself. It was verily the *chakra* of Mahavishnu; his body, at the centre was the hub; his strength of arm was its radiance; the arrows that winged their way from it were the spokes; the bow itself was the rim of the wheel; the twang of the bow and the sound of impact of the string and the hand were the roar of the flames that shot from the *chakra;* his prowess was the eye of the intellect, the sheen of his body was the lustre radiating from it; and the might of the divine weapons was its boundary, sending the *rakshasas* by thousands to the house of death with bow in hand looked like the *chakra* on the day of dissolution. In the space of the eighth part of a day did Sri Rama manage to destroy all by himself 10,000 *anikas* of cars, 18,000 *anikas* of elephants, 10,000 *anikas* of cavalry and their riders, and 2 lakhs of *anikas* of infantry. (one *anika* or *chamu* consists of 729 cars, 729 elephants, 2187 horses and 3645 infantry). This comes to something like 729, followed by 5 zeros, cars, 131220000 elephants, 102060000 horses, and 1458000000 infantry annihilated within 3¾ *naligas*. But we infer that there were higher armies, of the ordinary type. It is said that a *kabandha* (headless corpse) dances on the bloody torrent when an incredible number of troops,are swept away from the field. One crore of such dancers take the field,when one of the bells that grace the mighty bow of Rama twinkled once. Now they say that all the bells in the group rang incessantly for a period of one *yama* (¼ of a day).

Elephants and horses slain, cars smashed and foot-soldiers destroyed, that huge *rakshasa*-host, shorn of pride ran towards Lanka. Elephants, horses, chariots, *rakshasa* and *vanara*-heroes lay there in mountainous piles. The field was like the playground of Lord Rudra in the height of his wrath on the day of dissolution. *Devas, gandharvas, siddhas* and sages sang the praise of Rama, shouting "Well-done! well-done!"But he turned to Sugriva, Vibhishana, Jambavan, Hanuman,Mainda, Dvivida and the rest that stood by his side and said "I have the power of wielding this *gandharva astra*. So has the lord Paramasiva at the hour of destruction. Do not think that I used magic to destroy in a second countless *rakshasa*-hordes. It was only the potency of the *astra*". Thus did Sri Rama, like Indra the ruler of the gods in strength and valour, make short work of the *rakshasa*-forces. His mastery and skill in wielding weapons, human and divine, was immeasurable. The heavenly hosts, sang his glory with over-flowing hearts.

CHAPTER 95

THE LAMENT OF RAKSHASIS

AT the sight of the destruction of many thousand horses, horsemen, chariots with lofty pennons, and well-armed warriors, all wrought by the sharp arrows of Rama, the other *rakshasas* were dazed and distracted. Countless *rakshasa* women entered the battle-field, and wailed piteously over their husbands, sons or other kinsmen.

"Alas! Rama is the god of love to the God of Love; soft and delicate of limb, yet, unequalled in strength, he seeks but the welfare of all beings. Why did our Surpanakha set her heart upon this perfect person of matchless radiance, endowed with countless excellences? How she hoped to possess that mighty one when her own form and features are old, ugly and frightful to look at? Is she not huge of waist, wrinkled all over, with a white matted hair? She has not even one virtue to relieve her thousand vices. It is but justice to slay her so deformed and ugly. Sri Rama with face and features like the full-moon, and Surpanakha of dreadful looks are they not poles apart? A *rakshasa*-woman goes against nature when she sets her heart upon a man and she has perpetrated this black sin which everyone hates and condemns and ridicules. As a result Khara, Dushana, Trisiras, and other *rakshasa*-lords and 14000 of their best and bravest have perished. Maricha is no more. All the *rakshasa*-heroes of Lanka and their followers are now gathered to their ancestors, without a single exception. She lost her heart to Rama and wished to possess him a most unnatural desire. That was why Ravana made an enemy of Sri Rama, and carried away Sita; thus incurring the relentless wrath of Rama.

"Viradha, who set his heart upon Sita, was sent to his doom by a single shaft of Rama. Was this not enough to show his strength and valour? Never will Dasagriva, possess Sita. Khara and Dushana and their clan, where are they? And is that not enough for us? Again, Kabandha with his arms one *yojana* long, fell before the arrows of Rama, — was this not enough? Vali, the king of monkeys was huge of bulk like mount Meru. He was the son of Indra, ruler of the gods and strong beyond measure. He could not stand before the first arrow shot from the bow of Rama. We needed no further evidence of Rama's strength. Sugriva was a trembling refugee on mount Risyamuka bowed down with despair. And yet when Rama came to his help, the exile was installed as the undisputed lord of the monkeys. What more do we need?

Vibhishana offered counsel, consonant with right and justice and tending towards the well-being of the *rakshasa*-race, but our Ravana possessed of an evil spirit turned a deaf ear to it. Had he taken it to heart, would this Lanka of ours stretch thus a burning ground infested with dogs, jackals, corpses, and evil spirits? Kumbhakarna, mighty beyond measure, was slain by Rama. Was this not enough to bring Ravana to reason? Atikaya, the unconquered hero, and Indrajit, the very incarnation of strength and valour, fell before Lakshmana. Was this not enough to turn the heart of Ravana towards wise counsels? Wherever we turn, from every house, we hear wails, and shrieks, "Alas!. My son has been torn away from my side! My brother that came before me into the world is now no more! My Lord and husband is now but a name and memory. Single-handed, Rama has covered this field of battle with mountainous heaps of slain elephants, horses, chariots and *rakshasa*-heroes. He is no puny mortal, this Rama, we know not who he is — the lord Rudra or the Lord Mahavishnu or the great Indra, who paid for his seat on high with one hundred sacrifices, or the very Lord of Death himself come down in mortal guise to take us to his dark and dreadful world. Our heroes and warriors are now no more; we have lost all hope or desire of life. We see no end to our terror. We are left here to wail and grieve. Our Ravana has ten heads; a mighty warrior is he who has won wonderful powers from Brahma. And yet he is utterly ignorant that dreadful destruction awaits him. Should one stand against Rama, none can come between him and death, neither the *devas,* nor *gandharvas,* nor *pisachas*. Witness the good omens that attend Rama and the dark portents that dog Ravana in every battle till now. Ravana secured the favour of Lord Brahma through stern and dreadful observances and the word has gone forth that he has nothing to fear at the hands of the *devas, danavas* and *rakshasas;* but foolishly forgot to include human beings in the list. And from among them comes forth dreadful danger to all of us and to Ravana too. The *devas* were in the grip of Ravana's tyranny and prayed to Lord Brahma with terrible vows and austerities. He was pleased and with their welfare at his heart, he said, "From today, the *danavas* and *rakshasas* will ever walk surrounded by a cloud of fear". The gods with Indra at their head, offered worship to Lord Mahadeva, on his Bull. He too spoke from his heart and said, Ye! *devas!* in the far past, lord Mahavishnu gave you the *amrita* to share among you; and the *danavas* suffered the pangs of dreadful hunger and thirst. Even so there will go down into the mortal world a woman, Sita by name, to bring destruction on the *rakshasas* and their Lord. Wicked of deed and thought, that wretch will meet his fate through her". This put heart into the *devas*. Is there one who could say, "Fear not; take refuge in me" to created beings on the day of dissolution, when the lord of destruction comes to end an aeon? And is there one who could offer protection from Rama's arrows? The forest-fire closes round the she-elephants as they quake in terror and confusion. Even, so to us in the grip of mighty fear, no one comes to stretch a helping hand. Rama, whom the *rakshasa*-world has cause to fear, with none to save them, this the very Rama has afforded shelter to the intelligent Vibhishana, for whom this is the dawn of a bright new day". Even thus did the *rakshasa* women embrace one another and cry aloud in terror.

CHAPTER 96

RAVANA GOES FORTH TO BATTLE

AS the *rakshasa*-women sent up their lamentations from every house, Ravana listened and heaved burning sighs. He was sunk in anxious thought. His mind dwelt on his grief and disgrace. Maddened by fury he was dreadful to behold. Fire flashed from his bloodshot eyes. He hit his lips and waxed in wrath, like the blazing fire of dissolution; the very *rakshasas* quaked in terror at the sight. His look seemed to burn those around him; his tongue faltered through the fear that clutched his heart. And he called unto him Mahodara, Mahaparsva, and Virupaksha, his counsellors, and cried, "All our forces, order them to go forth to the field of battle this instant!" And his orders were carried out immediately. After performing the auspicious rites that were laid down on such occasions, they led their armed hosts to the battle-field. (Mahodara and Mahaparsva who were slain before were brothers of Ravana. Matta and Pramatta were the other names they bore). They came to Ravana, bowed to him over clasped hands and said "Victory, victory ever", and stood expectant. Ravana turned towards them and laughed with a peal-like thunder. He had scant respect for his foes, as he cried, "Like unto the divine Adityas, who destroy the worlds, at the end of long ages, my arrows, will issue from my bow and the place where Rama, Lakshmana, and their monkey-hosts stand will know them no more. My friends and kin, Khara, Kumbhakarna, Prahasta, Indrajit, and the other *rakshasa*-heroes will rejoice mightily this day."

"My arrows, like clouds, will hide from view the earth, the sky, the quarters, the rivers, and the seas. This day will I offer as a prey to my arrows the monkey-generals and their serried ranks. This day, my bow, will send out arrows like the billows of the ocean and my car move with the speed of mind, destroying the armies of monkeys. Their faces with the hue of lotus-pollen, will be the blossoming lotus flowers; their serried ranks will be lotus pools; and I shall be the lordly elephant in rut, descending into the waters and stirring them to the depths. This day the heads of the monkey-generals will be riddled by my shafts and look like lotus flowers with their stems sticking out. I will stem the speed of those warriors with my arrows, every one of which will torture to death a hundred heroes. This day, my people will wipe off their tears for the loss of husbands, sons, and brothers. I will avenge their death a million-fold. This day will I cover the earth with the cloven bodies of monkeys. This day jackals, vultures and other beasts and birds of prey, will have a surfeit of the flesh provided by my arrows. Let my chariot be got ready at once. Bring me my bow. All the *rakshasas* that are yet alive, let them come with me''.

Mahaparsva, the general, hearing these words of Ravana, turned towards the leaders of the hosts and said ''Let our troops be ready to march forth''. And the leaders lost no time in collecting them from their houses. Frightful of mien and form, the *rakshasas* stood ready for battle within a short space, armed with sword, broad sword, trident, club, bar, wheel axe and spiked mace and roaring dreadfully. And then a general brought round the car of Ravana, drawn by eight horses, furnished with every weapon, and handled by the most skilful driver. Ravana took his seat in that radiant chariot, and surrounded by countless *rakshasas,* he set out to fight. The earth quacked as if it would crack beneath his strength and majesty. Mahaparsva, Mahodara, and Virupaksha followed in their cars the earth with the speed of their cars and the sky with their war cries bent on achieving victory. Glancing back at his forces, Ravana bow in hand, radiant, like Yama, who starts forth on the day of dissolution to destroy all created beings, passed the northern gate where Rama and Lakshmana stood. Then the sun grew dim; darkness hung over the quarters; birds gave forth ghastly cries; the earth trembled in affright; the clouds rained blood; the horses stumbled on their way. A vulture sat on the top of Ravana's flag; Jackals howled hideously. The left arm and eye of Ravana throbbed. His face grew pale and his voice faltered. Thus were seen portents foretelling the defeat and death of Ravana. Meteors fell from the sky with a noise of thunder. Vultures and crows cried ominously. But he paid not the slightest heed to these omens and signs; caught in the noose of death he was bewildered in mind and went forth to battle, seeking his own death.

Hearing the noise of chariots, the monkey-hosts prepared themselves for battle. Then the *rakshasas* and monkeys challenged one another, declared their names and deeds of valour and fought dreadfully, each intent on victory. Ravana mad with fury destroyed without mercy crowds of monkeys with his arrows decked with gold. Some had their heads severed, some had their hearts pierced; some lost their ears; some had their flanks cut away; some were struck down breathless; some had their heads shattered and others had their eye-balls torn out. The lord of Lanka rolled his eyes fearfully and wherever he turned his car, the monkey-warriors took to their heels in utter confusion, unable to withstand the force of his arrows.

CHAPTER 97

THE DEATH OF VIRUPAKSHA

THUS maimed and mangled the monkey-warriors, covered the battle-field. Like moths that cannot draw near a blazing fire, they could not stand before the flaming arrows discharged single-handed by Ravana. Like elephants scorched by a forest-fire they were tortured by his keen arrows, and took to their heels with piteous cries. Like a strong wind scattering the clouds, his shafts drove the monkey-hordes before them. Thus throwing the monkeys into disorder he drew near to where Rama stood.

Then Sugriva placed Sushena over the monkeys to guard and rally them back and himself decided to give fight to Ravana. He was free from care now that he had entrusted his armies to Sushena, who was his equal in might. He tore up a huge tree and prepared to oppose Ravana. The monkeys stood on both sides and behind him, armed with huge crags and trees. Roaring frightfully, he crashed down many a *rakshasa*-hero as he passed along. (When the king marches forth to fight his servants follow him to gather back his weapons discharged by him). Even as the gales on the day of dissolution uproot and bring down tall trees, the onrush of Sugriva scattered the *rakshasas* all round.

Even as the clouds pour down on the birds a deluge of hail, Sugriva kept up a never-ceasing shower of rocks upon the *rakshasas*

And they fell down where they stood, with shattered heads, like unto hills uprooted. Virupaksha could not endure this pitiable sight of his armies perishing on all sides with hideous groans; He shouted out his own name and sprang from his car right on the back of a lofty elephant. He faced the monkeys, stemmed their course, grieved them sore by his keen shafts and put cheer into the hearts of his troops and rallied them. Pierced all over with his arrows, Sugriva was beside himself with wrath and decided to slay him. He tore up by the roots a huge tree and flung it full in the face of the elephant on which the *rakshasa* was mounted. Unable to stand the terrific blow, it retreated a bow's length and lay down on the ground shrieking loud. The *rakshasa* leapt from its back and equipped with sword and ox-hide shield, faced Sugriva. The monkeys tore up a crag, dark and huge like a cloud-bank and hurled it against Virupaksha. But the *rakshasa* withdrawing a little eluded it. Soon he brought down his sword upon Sugriva. The monkey-hero stood for a while, as if unconscious; then he sprang at his enemy with clenched fists and planted them right upon the broad chest of the *rakshasa,* who however made light of it and clove the armour of Sugriva, and kicked him aside. The lord of the monkey-world, leapt back at him and hit him with the sound and fury of thunder; he was beside himself with anger and shame. He watched his foe most carefully, caught him when he was off his guard and dealt a mighty blow on his forehead. The *rakshasa* measured his length on the earth with a broken head and blood streamed from his mouth. The monkeys shouted in joy at the sight of the famous *rakshasa*-hero writhing in mortal agony, his eye-balls bulging, and blood and foam issuing from his mouth. The two armies fought long and dreadfully, like two mighty oceans over-flowing their shores. When Virupaksha of mighty prowess, fell at the hands of the lord of the monkeys, the armies on either side, resembled Ganga in full flood, and one overflowing with terror and the other with joy.

CHAPTER 98

THE DEATH OF MAHODARA

THE two armies thinned gradually like two large lakes drying up by the summer heat. When the ruler of the *rakshasas* saw his forces annihilated and Virupaksha done to death, his wrath mounted high. As the monkeys bit and tore his forces he was filled with grief and he thought,"Was it fated that I should behold even this?"

Then, turning to Mahodara standing by, he said, "Best of heroes! it is on you I now depend to defeat the foe. Destroy the *vanara*-forces and demonstrate your prowess as well as your loyalty and the gratitude to your Master who has trusted you and done you so many favours. Fight with care and your utmost skill."

"To hear is to obey" replied Mahodara and he was lost in the monkey-hordes even as a moth falls into a flame. In deference to the words of Ravana and fired by his inherent valour, he slew the monkeys in thousands. But they gave a good account of themselves, bringing down the *rakshasas* with huge rocks uprooted. Mahodara blazed with wrath and cut off the heads and feet of the monkeys with his bright arrows decked with gold. Some fled to the corners of the field. Some took refuge with Sugriva. The lord of the monkeys, seeing his forces routed by Mahodara, rushed forward with a huge boulder and brought it down upon the foe. But the *rakshasa,* without blenching, cut it down with his arrows. It fell down in a cloud of splinters like unto a band of vultures scattered by terror. Sugriva felt small; anger over-mastered him; he tore up a lofty oak and flung it against the *rakshasa* who broke it to pieces with his arrows. Sugriva snatched an iron bolt that lay there, whirled it above his head and brought it down with tremendous force on the horses of Mahodara. The warrior leapt down lightly and grasped his club. They roared and with club and bolt clashed against each other, like two bulls or like dark rain-clouds charged with lightning. Then Mahodara hit Sugriva with his club blazing like the sun; Sugriva stopped it with his bolt. Both the weapons were broken to bits. Then Sugriva snatched an iron bar that lay near, whirled it aloft and aimed it at Mahodara. He met it with another club and the two weapons crashed into a huge shower of broken bits.

The two heroes fought long and fiercely with their bare fists, like two fires fed with oblations of butter. Weapons they had none. Matchless in strength and lustre, they punched, they slapped and they shouted. They fell down, they leapt aloft, they struck at each other. They threw each other down. Thus did the two heroes fight on until their arms were wearied. Then Mahodara sprang at Sugriva, arming himself quickly with sword and shield. The monkey followed his example and met him square and fair. Their bodies quivered with hate, as they roared mightily and chased each other around. Their energy grew apace, as they displayed everything that they knew about the science and art of warfare. They ran about and turned right and left, each intent on victory. Then Mahodara clove the shield of Sugriva most skilfully; and while he was drawing out his sword, Sugriva saw his chance and cut off the gaily ornamented head of Mahodara. At this sight his armies took to their heels in confusion. Sugriva and his monkeys proclaimed their victory. Ravana blazed in his wrath and Raghava rejoiced. The *rakshasas* hid themselves here and there with wan faces, and broken hearts. Like unto Surya in the full radiance of the noon did Surya's son Sugriva, bring down Mahodara of mountainous bulk, thus earning for himself, boundless fame. And he on his part, radiant with victory, was praised by the hosts of gods and *yakshas,* by the *siddhas* and created beings on earth.

CHAPTER 99

THE DEATH OF MAHAPARSVA

THE loss of Mahodara roused Mahaparsva to uncontrollable fury, and his arrows destroyed the forces of Angada. His shafts cut off the heads of the monkeys from their bodies, like a strong gale flowing down the ripe fruits of a palm tree. Some had their sides cloven; some had their arms shorn off; Mahaparsva kept up a never-ceasing downpour of arrows that made the hearts of the monkeys faint; they lost all ardour for battle and grew confused and desperate.

Angada could not brook the pitiable plight of his forces harassed thus by the foe. He increased his speed as the tides of the ocean rise and swell during the conjunctions of the fortnight. He snatched a *parigha* fashioned of iron, gleaming like the rays of the sun and brought it down upon Mahaparsva. The blow was strong enough to hurl the *rakshasa* down senseless, from his car, and his driver with him. Then Jambavan, like a mountain of inky blackness sprang from his place among his troops and smashed to dust the car and the horses of the *rakshasa*. After an hour, Mahaparsva came back to his senses and beset Angada sorely with his arrows. Jambavan was pierced in his chest with three arrows and Gavaksha was cloven by many. Angry at the agony they suffered, Angada whirled aloft with both hands a dreadful *parigha* and threw it with immense force at his foe, charged with angry speed, the weapon smashed the enemy's bow, arrows and head dress. Then Angada leapt upon him and gave him a tremendous slap on his face. But it roused further the wrath of the *rakshasa*. He snatched with his hand a huge battle-axe and whirling it round and round, sent it against Angada. It blazed in splendour being polished everyday with potent oils; it was hard like a huge mountain and none could stay or break it; it fell with dreadful force on the left shoulder of the monkey-hero, who lightly foiled it with his huge fist; and relentless as the *vajra* of Indra he struck Mahaparsva fair and square on his breast. Now Angada was the equal of his father, Vali, in strength and valour, he noted the vital spot of his enemy and hit at the very heart of Mahaparsva with unerring aim and the *rakshasa* fell down and died instantaneously, his heart smashed to a pulp. The forces that followed him were sore beset. Ravana was beside himself with wrath. Indra and the gods that ranged the skies shouted with delight and enthusiasm; the monkeys roared like lions at the victory achieved, and their combined sound entered the houses, ports and towers of Lanka. The sound roused the ruler of the *rakshasas* to mad fury and he hastened back to the battle-field.

CHAPTER 100

RAMA AND RAVANA

MAHODARA, Mahaparsva and Virupaksha the brave of heroes in the land were now no more; Ravana turned to his driver and cried wildly. "Rama and Lakshmana will I slay today, ease my heart of grief for the death of my ministers and counsellors, and avenge the insult offered to besieging my capital. Rama, the lofty tree has its blossom and fruit in Sita, its huge branches are the leading monkey-heroes, Sugriva, Jambavan, Kumuda, Nila, Mainda, Dvivida, Angada, Gandhamadana, Hanuman, and Sushena and today that tree shall fall under my hand". Thus did he roar and march against Raghava, the ten quarters groaning under the speed of his car. The broad earth quaked thereat with its rivers, mountains, forests, beasts, and birds. He discharged a dreadful *Tamasa astra* at the monkeys, who fell heaps on all sides. The dust raised by their fleet was fearful to see. The weapon, fashioned of old by Brahma himself, was beyond the power of the monkeys to withstand. At the sight of his armies helpless before the arrows of Ravana, Rama himself turned up to offer battle.

The *rakshasa*-hero, having scattered the monkeys before him beheld Rama standing in front. (Valmiki suggests that Rama was beyond the power of any enemy to foil; his matchless beauty and grace drew every one to him irresistibly; no heart could harbour any feeling of hate against him; it was the birth-right of one and all to find boundless joy and delight in his presence. But Ravana was wicked of heart. It was not given to him to bathe in the Supernal beauty of Rama heightened by his mighty bow that resembled a graceful whirl in the waters of immortality). No foe could ever dream of worsting him. He stood there in the battle-field with his brother Lakshmana by his side, like unto Mahavishnu and Devendra. He bent gracefully over his huge bow that looked like the lofty Meru. His eyes were red and broad, were like the petals of a blown red lotus. His arms stretched down to his knees. He could strike down the pride of his enemies. Strength and radiance were embodied in him. For help at need, he had Lakshmana himself, who was Adisesha in mortal guise. Beholding the monkeys fleeing in mad terror and Ravana drawing near him, he was delighted. Grasping his bow in the middle, he bent it, strung it, and twanged it with a sound that caused the earth to quake. The two armies fell down in senseless faint at the shower of Ravana's arrows and the twang of Rama's bow. Ravana himself looked like Rahu near the Sun and the Moon, as he stood in the path of the arrows of Rama and Lakshmana (Rahu approaches the Sun and Moon on the new moon day. The comparison stops here. It does not mean that their lustre dimmed at his sight). Then Lakshmana desired to engage the Lord of Lanka first. He bent his bow and shot at the enemy sharp arrows blazing like flames. But Ravana's arrows met them in the sky one to one, three to three, ten to ten, and so on. He displayed his skill and deftness of hand; and finding that the arrows of Lakshmana troubled him not, he made light of the prince, passed him by and faced Raghuvira, who stood there like mount Meru.

With eyes red with wrath he hid Rama behind a never-ceasing arrowy shower. Raghava cut them down by his *Bhallas* (curved arrows), and they fell on the ground like furious, ghastly serpents. Then they struck each other with various keen shafts. Right and left, round and round, did they display their skill in foot work. Neither drew back, but each returned for what he received. All beings trembled at heart, when they beheld the fight wondering whether Yama and Rudra were at war as it were. As rain-clouds cover the sky, lit up by flashes of lightning, even so, did their arrows hide the sky from view and only the fiery arrows lit up the scene. It looked as if the showers of arrows were windows in the firmament. The arrows were furnished with beautiful joints, sharp points, and decked with eagle feathers and endowed with enormous speed. In fact the two heroes by their arrowy downpour hid from sight earth and sky and caused utter darkness to descend. It was as if rain-clouds spread over the sky after the sunset. The battle between them each intent upon the death of the other resembled that between Indra and the *asura,* Vritra of yore. Never before had there been such a fight. Never had Ravana thought even in dream that he would face such a foe, Matchless bowmen, both of them matchless in the mastery of weapons, matchless too in their knowledge of the secrets of *astras,* they displayed every step and device known to men or gods. Even as the waves bank up in the direction of the wind their arrows piled up into a mountain wherever they went.

Then Ravana, matchless archer as he was, hit Rama on the forehead with a string of three arrows. Emitted from the fearful bow, the arrows descended on his head like the petals of a blue lily and lay there lightly, causing him no pain. Then Rama bent his bow and shot from it arrows winged with the *mantra* of Rudra. They hit Ravana's armour which was like a huge cloud-bank but made no impression on it and gave him no discomfort. Then Raghunandana picked out some arrows, spoke over them the *mantras* of rare *astras* and struck Ravana square on his forehead with them, but they were foiled and cloven by many shafts, from Ravana's bow. Hissing like five-headed serpents, these shafts ran into the earth. Thus the lord of Lanka met the *astra* of Raghava and in his turn sent against Rama an *astra* of *asuras*, which was dreadful to behold. From it there came out lions, tigers, vultures, eagles, crows, jackals, wolves, five-headed serpents, snakes, mules, boars, dogs, hens, crocodiles, black serpents and the like. (These were but arrows with such heads. Raghuvira, shining with energy, discharged the *astra* of Agni and from it sprang countless arrows with heads of blazing fire, sun, moon, half moon, meteors, planets, constellations, fire brands, and lightnings. The missile of Ravana was beaten by that of Rama and fell down from the sky, in fragments). Thereat, Sugriva and his warriors praised Rama highly and roared for very joy; and the son of Dasaratha was glad.

CHAPTER 101

LAKSHMANA STRUCK DOWN BY SAKTI

RAVANA'S rage rose high when he found his rare *astra* was wasted and he took another which was fashioned by the *asura* Maya and whose presiding god was Rudra. Exceedingly radiant it was. When he flung it at Raghava, tridents, maces, bars, bows, bolts, and many other weapons, hard like adamant and lapped in flames, issued from it with the speed of roaring winds at the ending of the worlds. Raghava, who knew the mystery of all rare *astras,* was glad to see it. His radiance and splendour grew apace; and he met the missile of the foe by the *astra* of the *gandharva.* Then Ravana shot the *astra* of Surya and from it sprang forth bright wheels, that spread over the sky and paved all quarters with suns and moons. But Rama destroyed them all by a continuous discharge of arrows. Then Ravana shot Rama through and through in every limb with ten choice shafts. But the resplendent prince stood unperturbed and in his return pierced every limb of his foe with his arrows.

While Rama took rest for a while, Lakshmana who had first met Ravana in fight and held back since the *rakshasa* was having it with Rama, came up now and with seven select arrows cut down the flag on Ravana's car (it bore a human head) and along with it the head of the driver himself gaily adorned with ear-rings. Then with five keen arrows he cut to bits the bow of Ravana shaped like the trunk of an elephant. Meanwhile Vibhishana joined the fray and brought his dreadful club on the horses yoked to the car that resembled black cloud-banks or dark mountains. Ravana leapt from the useless vehicle, rushed upon Vibhishana in uncontrollable wrath and struck him with a *sakti* (weapon), dreadful like the thunderbolt, but Lakshmana cut it to bits with three shafts as it drew near; and the monkeys shouted loud. The *sakti* adorned with garlands of gold, fell down in three bits lapped in flames like a blazing meteor. The eyes of Ravana shot sparks of fire out of pure wrath and he took up another mighty *sakti.* It was worshipped with sandal and frankincense and other rare perfumes; even Yama dared not draw near it; it was blazing with radiance and dreadful to behold like the bolt of Indra; it had behind it the full force and power of Ravana. Lakshmana beheld it coming against Vibhishana, to drink of his life-breaths. "Should this touch Vibhishana, he cannot survive" thought Lakshmana and thrusting Vibhishana aside, he stood forward, and with a shower of arrows prevented Ravana from discharging the *sakti*. Foiled in his purpose of slaying Vibhishana, Ravana cried out in anger; "Wretch you stood between Vibhishana, and his death this day. But you will pay for that folly; this *sakti* will take your life instead. Behold this weapon fattened with the lives of many a foe and still bespattered with their blood. It will now cleave your heart and bring me your life. And charged with fury, he hurled the *sakti* at Lakshmana. From its eight golden bells it gave out mighty music. Maya had fashioned it with his magic arts. It has never been known to fail and its very nature is to destroy those against whom it is sent. It brightened up the space around as it sped towards Lakshmana. The *rakshasa* roared with joy being certain that Lakshmana would not escape. With terrible speed and thundering like the *vajra* of Indra, it approached Lakshmana. Then Rama blessed Lakshmana, "May all be well with you" and he said to the *sakti* "you shall not slay Lakshmana; you shall go back empty". The *sakti* shot with fury by Ravana fell like a serpent of doom on the broad chest of Lakshmana, who faced it without a tremor. It sank deep into the body of the prince with all the strength and force that Ravana had put behind it, when he whirled it aloft. It was lapped in fierce flames like the tongue of a great serpent. It clove the heart of Lakshmana and struck him down to the earth.

Rama who stood by, was sore grieved because of his immense love for Lakshmana. Despite his strength and glory, he could not endure this sight. He thought for a while what he should do, and stood there with streaming eyes and blazing with anger like the fire of dissolution. Soon he mastered himself; he decided that it was no time for grief and that he should take his heart on taking the life of Ravana and engaged himself in a terrible fight with him. The pitiable sight of Lakshmana called back to him the memory of the abduction of Sita. The prince lay there like a stricken serpent with his heart cloven by the *sakti* and his body bathed in blood. "This Ravana shall never escape his doom at my hands" said he. Ravana himself kept up a shower of arrows so that the monkey-chiefs could not take out the *sakti* and break it and Lakshmana lay pinned to the earth. But Rama drew out the dreadful weapon with ease, passed his hands over it and broke it to bits. Then Ravana riddled with arrows the entire body of Rama and all his vital spots. But Rama not heeding it, clasped Lakshmana to his heart and said to Sugriva and Hanuman". Take good care of Lakshmana here like the *Chataka* birds that await eagerly the welcome rains at the end of summer. I have been waiting for destroying this sinful wretch; Now the time has come. Now shall I put forth my prowess and cut down his ten heads within a *muhurta* (48 minutes). Rama or Ravana will lie dead. I gave up the crown which was within my grasp. I exiled myself to the dark forest of Dandaka. I was a wanderer for many a year. Sita was taken from me. I fought with the dark *rakshasas.* The thought of all this caused me unbearable grief like the horrors of hell. But today, with the death of Ravana I shall forget it all. It was for this that I drew after me these monkey-hosts so far away from their homes, that I slew Vali, that I installed Sugriva in his place and that I crossed the pathless waters, building a bridge over it. It was all on account of this *rakshasa* who now stands before me. Shall he go back alive ? As well could one escape with life from the coils of a serpent whose very look is death. All of you, sit at ease on these mounds and look at our fight. The worlds above and below, *gandharvas, siddhas, charanas* and *rishis* know full well that Rama has no equal in valour and prowess. He brings joy and peace to the hearts of all. (He means that this was the purpose of his descent). This day will be a day of rejoicing for all time to come. All created beings, animate and otherwise, gods and mortals, will behold and acclaim the wonderful battle of today".

Saying this, he struck the *rakshasa* with sharp arrows decked with gold. Ravana poured on Rama, blazing *narachas* and chills like rain-clouds emptying themselves in torrents. The clash of the arrows they shot against each other was dreadful to hear. They fell broken from the sky with flaming points down to the earth. The twang of their bows struck terror in the hearts of all creatures. Like a huge cloud-bank lashed by the storm, Ravana was sore beset by the arrows of Rama and unable to stand, fled in fear from the field.

CHAPTER 102

LAKSHMANA RECOVERS

SEEING Lakshmana lying on the earth, struck down by the *sakti* of Ravana and bathed in blood, Rama kept on a dreadful fight with the *rakshasas* and discharged a never ceasing shower of arrows; yet he called Sushena and said, "Lakshmana, the prince of warriors, has been struck down by the *sakti* of Ravana. He writhes in agony like a serpent; and my heart grows heavy, for, dearer unto me than life is he, my Lakshmana. When he is bathed in blood, how shall I fight the enemy, my mind all distracted? Endowed with every excellence, this prince of valour delights in battle; he was born my brother; he followed me here, secure in my protection; and should he pass away, what joy would I have in life? Life would be a sore burden unto me. My valour ebbs away from me, as if ashamed. My bow slips from my hands, I cannot choose or hold my arrows; my eyes are blinded with hot tears. Just as in a dream one tries to escape a terrible danger by running, but his feet are clogged with lead and would not move; even so, black care weighs me down. It seems best to let go my life".

Thus did Raghuvira grieve and lament, beholding Lakshmana, hit in his vitals and breathing hard from intense pain. Anger and grief mastered him, he let go his hold on his senses and cried, "When Lakshmana, the breath of my life, rolls on the earth in dirt and dust, what have I to do with battle, throne or life itself? I am all bewildered, when my dear brother lies stricken. My senses, mind and intellect, are one with him. I am but a living corpse. Wives are easy to get anywhere in the world; and so are other kith and kin, yet I know of no land where a brother could be got". Grief clouded Rama's senses; he heaved deep and made piteous signs, He fell on the ground by the side of his brother. Then Sushena, the monkey-chief, essayed to calm him.

"Lord! Lakshmana, endowed with every auspicious mark, is not dead ; his face is pleasing to look at. He preserves his natural hue, his splendour has not waned, he yet radiates lustre; and his hands are red like lotuses; his eyes are clear. There are not the marks of death. They signify length of years, I say he is not dead; he lives. His heart beats evenly. He is like one in deep and peaceful sleep with arms and legs stretched wide. Doubt not! he lives and will live on".

And, he called Anjaneya that stood near by, and cried "Son of Vayu", find quickly your way to the mountain of medicinal herbs. Jambavan has given you a clear idea of the location and features. Fetch me, from its southern peak, the potent medicines known as *Visalyakarani, Savarnakarani, Sandhanakarani,* and *Sanjivini.* I shall see that Lakshmana recovers from his fainting fit and is once more his bold brave self."

Anjaneya made his way straight through the sky to the mountain of magic herbs, but could not find out the plants that he should fetch. "If I go back to Sushena for fuller details, it is but waste of time and my purpose will be foiled. It is best to transport the peak itself and place it before Sushena. He has told me that the herbs grow here and it must be true since my heart and mind are clear". Thinking thus, he coiled his tail thrice round the southern peak and gave three mighty pulls at it. It came away, with all its birds and beasts, rivers and forests, and he returned as quickly as he went, playing lightly with the huge crest on his head. And he descended in the midst of his friends, like a dark rain-cloud making its way gently to the earth.

He rested for a while. Then depositing the peak before Sushena, he said "Pity, I could not identify the particular medicines you wanted . But they are all here, in this peak that I have brought." (During the battle with Indrajit, Sushena, the doctor, wanted to treat Lakshmana and the wounded monkeys and he took care to stock a good quantity of remedies. Why then would he direct Maruti to go again to bring them? It cannot be that he had exhausted them over Lakshmana, Vibhishana and others. Again Maruti was no fool. His memory was wonderful. It was only a few days earlier that he had fetched the herbs for Sushena and took it back again. Then how could he say that he could not lay his hands on the herbs and that his heart and mind were not clear? So his tearing up the peak itself cannot be explained consistently-Ramanuja). (But there was no reference to the remedy being stocked after use as observed by the commentator').

Sushena praised Maruti highly and gathered whatever medicinal herbs he wanted from the peak. The monkeys and the *rakshasas* were struck with wonder at the rare feat of Maruti, that even the gods could not perform. Then Sushena washed these herbs clean, prepared them skilfully and caused Lakshmana to inhale them. The arrows dropped away from his body; his wounds were healed, his pain gone, and the prince sprang from the ground with all his original strength and valour. The monkeys shouted 'good, good' and acclaimed Sushena. Raghuvira called Lakshmana unto himself and fondly clasped him to his heart, his eyes blinded with tears of joy''. Best and bravest of heroes! Great merit must I have laid up before to see you come back from the halls of death. What have I to do with Sita or victory or life itself, if you were taken away from me?

Lakshmana was pained by these words and spoke in faltering accents, "Brother mine! these words do not become you. Your valour cannot go fruitless. You have given the pledge that you would slay Ravana and seat Vibhishana on his throne. Why should you speak thus like a weakling and a non-entity? Embodiment of virtue, pure and unsullied! the good and the great do not go back on their word, but make it good at any cost. It is unjust that for my sake you should relax your keenness for recovering Sita and winning victory. Slay Ravana and fulfil your word. No foe that crosses your path can survive. The elephant that has been seen by the sharp-teethed lion roaring in rage, can it hope to escape? This wicked wretch must be quickly despatched before the sun sets. If you should ever fulfil your word, if you should slay Ravana in battle, if you should ever recover lady Sita, pray, do now quickly what I beg you to do.

CHAPTER 103

RAMA IN THE CHARIOT OF INDRA

LISTENING to Lakshmana's words, Raghunatha bent his bow and shot dreadful arrows at Ravana. The *rakshasa* took another car, rushed at Rama like Rahu after the sun, and struck him with frightful arrows like the bolt of Indra, seated as he was on his car. Raghunatha clove the ten-headed giant with flaming arrow. The Lord of the heaven-world sent down his car to Rama at the request of the *devas*, the *gandharvas,* and *danavas,* who decided that it was not fair that Rama should fight on foot against a foe seated in a chariot. Indra's chariot was decked with gold; and with its countless golden bells twingled sweetly.It was radiant like the morning sun. Noble steeds adorned with gems and shining like the sun were yoked to it.

It had golden windows and white chowries, a huge golden flag towered aloft gracefully. Matali, the driver of Indra, drove it to where Rama was and spoke from his seat with folded hands holding a whip. "Lord! the ruler of the heavenly world has sent you this chariot anxious that you should defeat Ravana. Doom of the *rakshasa*-world of measureless lustre and matchless strength! pray, accept this mighty bow, this excellent armour blazing like fire, these arrows radiant like the sun and this keen sword. Take your place on this chariot and bring down Ravana, having me as the charioteer like Indra, the great, routed the *danavas*. And it is my good fortune to do the same service for you this day when you slay Ravana. Rama went round the car reverently, saluted it and seated himself on it, illuminating the whole world like the full moon.

Wonderful beyond belief was the battle that followed between Rama and Ravana. The hair stood on end on the bodies of those that beheld it and dark fear gripped their hearts. Rama, a past master in the secrets of the most potent *astras*, met the *astras* of Ravana by others of the same kind — *gandharva, daiva,* and the like. Infuriated, Ravana discharged the *rakshasa-astra* from his bow, from which shot out gold bound arrows that coiled themselves round

Rama, like dreadful venomous serpents and caused him pain, with their mouths aflame. Arrows blazing like Vasuki, Karkotaka and other great *nagas,* hid the quarters. Then Rama sent against them the *Garudastra* from which the arrows flew out and spread all over like fiery eagles and destroyed the serpents. They had the power of taking any shape at will. Ravana found his *astras* foiled, one after another and in his blind fury he riddled Rama with arrowy showers and also troubled Matali with keen shafts. With one arrow he cut down the banner of gold that waved aloft; and he sorely beset the horses of divine breed that drove the car. *Devas, danavas, gandharvas,* and *charanas* were filled with sorrow at that wonderful feet of his. And so were the *siddhas,* sages, monkey-chiefs and Vibhishana, when they saw Rama being harassed by the foe. All grieved to see the full moon, Rama, in the grip of Rahu, in the shape of Ravana.

The planet Mercury (Budha) overpowered the constellation Rohini, the beloved wife of the Moon. Prajapati was the presiding deity of it. It betokened danger to all the worlds. The waves of the sea, enveloped in smoke, seemed to rise and lash the sun. The lord of the day was dimmed in lustre. It grew black like a sword and was a headless corpse seen in it. A comet laid its grasp on the sun. The planet Mars stood over against the constellation Visakha, the guardian of the Kosala kings, and the Asvins were its presiding deities. And there was Ravana to complete the scene, huge in bulk like the Mainaka mountain, with his ten heads and twenty arms; the bow he wielded was like a mountain itself. Sri Rama, pressed by him, found no time to set his arrows on the bow and then against him. Then he reminded himself of what he should do; his brows were bent in a dreadful frown, and his angry red eyes seemed ready to burn up all creation.

CHAPTER 104

RAVANA DISCHARGES HIS TRIDENT

AT the sight of Raghuvira, the wise one, thus enraged, all creatures quaked in terror, unable to lift their eyes to him. The earth shook to its foundations. The mountains tottered with all their forests and beasts, like lions and tigers. The oceans rose. The birds cried harshly. Rumbling dreadfully the clouds overspread the four quarters of the sky. The anger of Rama and the dreadful portents struck terror into the hearts of all creatures. Ravana too was afraid.

The heavens above were crowded with the cars of the *devas, gandharvas, uragas, garudas, danavas, daityas,* and *rishis,* all eager to have a sight of the wonderful battle between the two renowned heroes which was destructive like the final dissolution. The fight beween the two with strange weapons and ghastly *astras* heightened the eagerness and fear of those that witnessed it. Then, the heavenly hosts out of love for Rama, repeatedly blessed him, saying "Raghunandana! may you defeat Ravana". On the other hand, the *asuras* blessed Ravana, saying "Ten-headed Lord! slay Rama", out of their fondness for him. (True, that Ravana oppressed the *devas* and the *asuras* alike; but the *asuras,* prayed for victory to Ravana. Should Rama win the day, it would add immensely to the strength and power of their enemies, the *devas*).

While the onlookers were, fanning the flame thus, Ravana set his heart upon the death of Rama and grasped in mad fury a weapon of rare powers. Then he bethought himself, "Shall I use this now or keep it till a more dangerous occasion arises". It was hard like the *vajra* of Indra. Its roar was terrible. It was covered with iron spikes like unto lofty mountain peaks. It was enough to destroy the foes. Sharp were its points like the fire of dissolution enveloped in smoke. It threw into shade the trident of the Lord Rudra himself; enemies dared not draw near. It was quite enough to cut and hack and cleave the bodies of all creatures; and make them die in agony and terror. Ravana, blazed in his wrath as he grasped the trident by the middle, lifted it above his head and roared like thunder;

and his *rakshasa*-warriors stood around him in wonder, with eyes red with anger, and mountainous of bulk, the sound of his roars, from their deep and powerful throats, the *rakshasa*- hosts were filled with irrepressible joy and exclaimed : "Rama is no more". The sky and the earth and the quarters, quacked in fear. All creatures were bereft of their senses at the tremendous roars of that wicked one. The waters of the seas were sorely troubled. Ravana waved the trident aloft and roared more frightfully "Rama! See you this trident. The *vajra* of Indra itself makes no show by its side. I throw this at you, out of the unspeakable wrath in my heart. You and your brother to help you will be no more in a moment. Many a *rakshasa* here has fallen by your hands. Are you not eager for a fight? This day you will die at my hands and rise to the high worlds. This day I will slay you and place you on the same level as my dead *rakshasas*. Stay, stay; let me allow this trident to drink your life-breaths" and he shot it at Rama. Wrapped in flames and lightnings, it came on with a deafening noise from the eight gold bells on it. Raghuvira bent his bow, and stayed its course like unto Indra, putting out the fires of dissolution with his blinding rains, but they were no where to be seen, consumed as they were like moths in a fire. Rama was filled with unspeakable wrath when he saw that his arrows were reduced to ashes, by the power of the trident, he grasped a *sakti* that was given to him by Indra, through Matali the driver; he held it aloft and waved it with a frightful speed. Whirled with the boundless strength and force that Rama put in his arms, the gold bells on it chimed sweetly. The sky blazed with the splendour of that weapon even as it was paved with meteors, at the end of long ages. It dashed against the weapons of Ravana, drained it of its strength and its lustre, and reduced it to a blinding shower of dust. Then Rama shot his arrows with rare quickness and struck at the horses yoked in the *rakshasa's* car; and they were endowed with the speed of the wind. Ravana was hit on his face and breast and cloven. His limbs were pierced through and through and rained torrents of blood. The hero resembled an *asoka* tree in bloom. Thus wounded sore all over his body and bathed in bloods, he lost heart in the very thick of the fight. But he recovered himself and was possessed of immeasurable fury.

CHAPTER 105

RAVANA'S CHARIOTEER DRIVES AWAY THE CHARIOT FROM THE BATTLEFIELD

BEING thus afflicted by the angry Rama, Ravana,who generally applauds the valour of the enemy in the battle-field, became furious. With eyes becoming red on account of wrath, controlling his breath, the valorous Ravana, struck Rama with extreme rage at that great battle. Ravana pierced the body of Rama with thousands of sharp shafts, as if a cloud fills the tank with bounteous showers of water from the sky. Being thus struck with a shower of the enemy, Kakutstha did not shake even a little. Will the great Meru ever tremble? He obstructed the shower of shafts with suitable shafts and remained unperturbed in the battle, just as obstructing the rays of the sun with an umbrella. Then the enraged *rakshasa* struck Rama on the chest quickly with thousands of shafts. Then the brother of Lakshmana being bathed in blood, appeared to be a *kimsuka* tree in the forest abound with flowers. Furious on account of the wounds made by those shafts, Rama, radiant like the sun at the time of deluge, discharged powerful shafts.Both of them were not able to perceive each other in the darkness caused by their swift discharge of arrows.

Then Rama was much enraged and spoke harsh words to Ravana, "You vile *rakshasa!* you carried away my unprotected wife from the Janasthana without my knowledge. Hence you are not valorous. You think that you are brave after quickly carrying away Vaidehi staying alone in the great forest separated from her husband. After having taken her, a woman unguarded forcibly away, after doing this wicked act, you think that you are brave. The violator of etiquettes! the shameless one! One who has discarded virtuous conduct! Having invited death out of pride and arrogance, you rejoice that you are valorous. You have indeed done a great and praiseworthy act, you brother of Kubera, with your mighty army. You will now reep the fruit of your vile act done out of pride and arrogance. Oh vile one! You think that you are a great warrior.

You never feel ashamed in abducting Sita like a thief. Had you laid your hands forcibly on Sita in my presence you would have reached the place of Khara, being struck by my arrows. It is a good thing that you have come under my purview, you vile one! I will despatch you to the abode of Yama, with my sharp arrows. Let the wild beasts make a feast of your head with the radiant pendents, cut down by my arrows and rolling on the dust. Ravana! May the vultures pounce on your chest, fallen on the ground, and drink the blood and quench their thirst. May the birds pull out the intestines from your lifeless body pierced by my shafts, just as the Garuda does the serpents''.

Rama, the conqueror of his foes, spoke to Ravana thus and showered a rain of arrows on Ravana, who was nearby. The strength of Rama's weapons, his valour, strength and joy doubled as he thought of killing his foe. All the weapons became manifest to him, the omniscient, On account of great joy, all the weapons became readily manifest in his hands.

Noticing the auspicious indications on his own person, Rama, the destroyer of the *rakshasas,* again struck at Ravana with redoubled vigour. Ravana became broken-hearted being struck by the shower of stones of the monkeys and the shower of arrows of Raghava. He neither bent his bow; nor discharged his arrows; nor attempted to obstruct the missiles of Rama. He lost control over the senses and became broken-hearted. The missiles discharged by him had no power to do even a little harm to the enemy. The charioteer noticed Ravana suffering as one heading towards death, slowly drove the chariot away from the battle-field, perturbed not in the least.

CHAPTER 106

RAVANA'S CHARIOT COMES BACK

THE thought came to Ravana, "Why I was even now fighting the foe; how is it that I fainted? His eyes, glowed red with wrath; impelled by resistless fate, he vented it upon his innocent driver. You fool! Did you take it into your head that I lost my vigour and might and manliness? Did you conclude that strength and lustre had waned away and that I was a coward, to turn my back on the field of battle? My arts of magic, have they become nothing? My divine weapons, have they taken to flight? You dared to follow your own counsel, and make little of me, as of no worth. Without knowing my purpose, you brought me away from the field of battle. You have blackened my face in the presence of the enemy. Till now, I have been endowed with matchless fame, valour, splendour and steadfastness, as one who never turned his back in battle. All this earned during long ages and with unremitting effort, you have ruined in a second, mean wretch! My enemy is no ordinary man. He is famed as a mighty hero; I sought to make his heart rejoice with my valour.

You know full well, that my ardour for battle is boundless; yet you have made me for all time a mark for the finger of scorn, as a coward and a weakling, and that in the presence of my hated foe. When I think of what you did, that instead of keeping my car before the enemy, you brought it here, I am forced to conclude that you have been bought over by him. No friend or well-wisher of mine would have acted thus. This is the act of a deadly enemy. Your action has been utterly wrong. Now, turn back the car and take me to the battle-field before my enemy seeks me out here. If you call yourself my friend, if your memory keeps count of the favours you have received from me, do not disgrace me in the right presence of my opponents." Thus did he foolishly accuse his driver, who but sought his safety and well- being.

But that *rakshasa* was no fool; he was wise beyond his years; he knew full well the nature of his master; and he respectfully spoke words of good counsel. "Fear has no part in me. My mind and senses are clear and strong. Foes have not won me over. Negligence, unfriendliness, ingratitude — these are foreign to me; I but seek your well-being and good name I seek to preserve them; my heart went out to you in friendship and impelled me to do what I did. I thought you would approve it. I know now it was distasteful to you. Your prosperity was my sole concern. It ill-becomes you to cast aspersion on me, as if I had come of a lineage unknown to name and fame, and as if I were mean of heart and wicked of nature. Fast falling like a river from a lofty height I turned away your car from the field of battle. True, but listen to my reason. After doing mighty deeds of valour today you were a little tired, your face was dim. Your heart was cheerless. I knew it. The horses too were tired with hard work all the day. Like cattle lashed by a fierce downpour, they were weak and exhausted with the heat of the sun. Again, I noted signs inauspicious to us. A driver of the car, if he is worth anything, should carefully note times and places, as well as signs, auspicious and otherwise. Marks of cheerfulness or sorrow of joy, despair, in the face of the master, the waxing or waning of energy and strength he should note, the level of the field high or low, the favourable moment for fight, the strength and weakness of the foe, noting all these he should know when to advance, where to stand up, when to draw back and when to pass by. I observed that my master and these horses were utterly worn out. I knew that, unless they recovered, defeat and disgrace was certain at the hands of the foe. I therefore took it upon myself to take the car away from the field. I would not have you think that it was my wish or a pleasure to me to do so. It was but my love and respect for you, and no other motive, that made me act as I did. I am ever at your service. Else, how can I hope to repay what I have received at your hands".

Ravana was mightily pleased at these words. He praised his wisdom and solicitude. Eager to renew the fight, he cried, "Driver, take back this car to where Rama is and that with the speed of thought. Ravana does not leave the field of battle with his foe alive". He rewarded the driver with the priceless ornament he wore upon his arm. And the driver lost no time in bringing the car right before Rama.

CHAPTER 107

AGASTYA IMPARTS THE ADITYAHRIDAYA TO RAMA

MAHARSHI Agastya was one of those that came there with the *deva* host to witness the wonderful battle between Rama and Ravana, He observed that Ravana was fatigued after a hard fight but faced Rama once again with boundless anger; he also noted that Rama himself was sunk in thought how to overcome Ravana without revealing his supreme divinity. So he drew near Raghuvira and addressed him. (Tirtha remarks thus : Ravana was sore beset by the arrows of Rama; his driver took him away from the battlefield; the sun rose in the heavens; Rama himself was somewhat tired after the long fight, and was revolving within himself as to how to bring the *rakshasa* to his doom. Then Ravana came there on his car eager to renew the fight. *Maharishi* Agastya noted it and said, "Raghupati you will overcome Ravana even now; be not anxious. But you will do well to increase your infirm prowess by worshipping the sun-god through the *Adityahridaya*". And he descended from above to impart the *mantra*).

"Rama! Rama! of boundless valour! have you forgotten your matchless deeds of heroism? I will impart to you a secret, eternal as the *Vedas*. Listen to this hymn of praise known as the *Adityahridaya*. It will gladden the heart of the Sun God; boundless is the merit gained by those who recite it; Our foes will perish; victory will be ours. The power of this *mantra* knows no waning. It brings in its wake all good things and purifies us of all former sins. Dispelling every sin committed till now, bodily illness and mental care, it lengthens the span of one's natural life. Utter, my child, this mighty hymn of praise. You will gain the strength to vanquish your foes. The Supreme Lord present in the heart of the Sun, is also the inner ruler who sits in our heart and directs everything. The *sruti* runs thus : "He who abides in the sun, he who guides the sun,"; "He who resides in the heart of Aditya and in the self runs the mind".

The god whom you should meditate upon is golden-rayed; he has risen high in the sky. He is the Lord of all the gods, their soul that holds them all within himself. (The *sruti* declares: "Beyond this, beyond the heavens and the worlds above, beyond this universe, beyond everything manifest, is the light that illuminates the higher worlds. Day and night he gives light to the worlds. It is his splendour that lights up the sun, the moon, the fire and the rest). He protects the worlds through the sunshine, rain and dew; so praise him through this *Adityahridaya*. (The *sruti* has it — "The sun, the moon, the stars, the lightning illuminate not that spot, why speak of the Lord of Fire. All these are made to shine but through his splendour and depend upon him. Next he gives a reason why he alone should be adored when there are other mighty presences. All of them are contained in him).

He is the soul verily of all the *devas*. (The *sruti* tells us that "the sun is the soul of the Universe and the support", "He is at the heart of all gods"). He is endowed with the power of crushing foes; he protects the worlds through his rays. (He extends his light and favour over the ever-liberated ones and endows them with their very essence of being. They enjoy that existence through his eternal wish. Ever dear to the heart of the Lord, they are eternal; this is the comment of Tirtha). He protects through his ray the *devas*, the *asuras* and all other created beings. (We have the Vedic texts "The offerings duly made in the fire reach the Lord Aditya; and he sends down the rain; and from it, we have food; and from it we have the whole creation". The *Gita* tells us, "win the favour of the Gods through *yagas* and they will bestow their favour for you through the rains they send").

"He is verily the Supreme One, whom the yogis meditate upon in their hearts", the golden-hued Purusha in the centre of the solar orb, the four-faced Brahma, Mahavishnu, Paramasiva, Subrahmanya, the nine Prajapatis, Mahendra, Kubera, the god Mrityu, Yama, Soma, Varuna, the Pitris, the *vasus*, the *sadhyas*, the Asvins, the Maruts, Manu, Vayu, Agni and other gods hold Him in their hearts as the inner ruler. "He is verily the inner ruler of you, and me and other beings" says Brahma to Siva. He is Upendra, in whom Vishnu took birth. He is Siva according to the text. He is Brahma.

He is Siva. He is Hari. He is Indra. He is Subrahmanya. He is Skanda, who drains away the energy of foes. He is the Prajapati, as the text runs, "that moves in the womb of the Universe". He is Mahendra, according to the *Veda,* "they sought Indra in the highest *akasa".* "Indra became very firm through his might". He is endowed with power, greatness and potency by his very nature. It is he that gives us food and wealth; hence he is Kubera, though he brings about the results of our actions only. He is time, because the *sruti* tells us, "I bow unto the spirit of time that makes little of time itslef". Again the *Brahmasutra* has it that he is the eater of all since he destroys all creation, animate and inanimate. Parasara tells us that the Lord knows no beginning as He is the spirit of time. He is Yama, because he judges all creatures and dispenses the results of their actions. Manu tells us"the King Yama, the son of Surya abides in your heart.". He is Soma, because he keeps the waters of immortality ever fresh and flowing. "Soma moves as the wind. He brightens up the intellect of creatures; he creates the *akasa".* So we have it that he is the seed and root of all created beings.

Varuna : (The Lord of Waters; a *smriti* has it that the word *ap* denotes men and waters. The two are the abode of one who is therefore named Narayana. The vedic text says, "he brought out the waters in the beginning; so he is the lord of all the objects denoted by the word *ap".*

Pitris : They are Agnishvattas, Barhishadas, Ajyapas, Somapas, Sukalins, and the like.

Vasus : they are eight in number: Dhruva, Tara, Soma, Apas, Vaisvanara, Anila, Pratyusha and Prabhava; or according to a vedic text "Agni, the earth, Vayu, the middle world, the sun, *akasa,* the moon and the stars", are the *Vasus.*

Sadhyas : Manu, Mantra, Pranada, Chetayana, Viddhi, Jaya, Naya, Hamsa, Narayana, Prabhava, Vidhu, Viryavan (twelve in number); they are meant for multiplying the beings in the world, the *mantras* form their body; "They are born in the *manvantaras* as the sons of Dharma", says the *Vayupurana.*

Asvins : born of the sun and his wife Samjna when she took the form of a mare.

Marut : So named because they never die. They are 51 in number, beginning with Sukrajyoti according to *Vayupurana*.

Manu : The *Veda* says, "There is no other but he who thinks". The root *man* means to think.

Vayu : He causes everything to smell sweet according to the *sruti* text. All acts, all desires and all scents, all tastes, are verily He.

Agni : distributes to the gods the offerings made in the *yagas*. *Yagas, yajnas,* tank, well and such like public benefits are brought about with his cooperation, likewise he supports the worlds so far created and those that are still being fashioned. He is like the axis round which the world revolves. He is verily Agni, he is verily Vayu, he is verily Surya, he is verily Chandra — *sruti*.

He is verily the cause of all beings functioning ("If this *akasa* exists not in its form of happiness, who can dare to breath, who can dare to live?" - *sruti* - He brings about the spring and the other seasons (The *Vishnusahasranama* has the word *ritu* as one of the names of the Lord). According to the text, "not an atom moves except through him", he abides in all beings as their inner ruler and brings about all acts. The *sruti* tells us "He enters the heart of beings and causes to act". He is the means of attaining the highest wisdom. (They who ever centre their thoughts on me and adore with love are endowed by me with *jnanayoga;* and that lands them on to me — *Gita).*

Till now I have instructed you in the form and qualities of the god whom you have to worship through this hymn of praise. Now, I shall teach you the hymn itself known as *Adityahridaya*. You took birth as Aditi's son; you brought into being this Universe; impelled by you all creatures act; you range through the skies for the good of the world. Through showers of rain you nourish all beings. Lustrous are your rays. You are golden-hued; you shine in boundless splendour. You created the golden world of Brahma; you create the day.

Black horses draw his car; many thousands are his rays. One single horse named Sapta draws him, so the *sruti* says. Extremely bright, he puts to flight the darkness; from him proceeds all happiness, he annihilates all forms; and again he recreates them by being reborn in the Universe that lay dead; he shines for ever.

He is within the golden universe; (Manu says that the egg is golden in hue like a million suns). He is the home of coolness for those who are scorched by the three fires that torment the flesh; He burns everything; He lights up every-thing; he is extolled by all; by day he holds the fire within himself; (the *sruti* says that when the sun rises, the Lord of fire takes his place by him in his car). Born as the son of Aditi, he is the protector of Purandara; he withdraws himself in the evening; he dispels the mist; he is the lord of the firmament. He has the strength to shelter Rahu and shake off his hold (the sun is praised in the forenoon with the hymns of the *Rigveda;* and at midday with the hymns of the *Yajurveda;* and at sunset with the hymns of the *Samaveda;* thus does he traverse the heavens with the three *Vedas* in attendance-*Sruti).* He is the cause of the rains; he is the friend of the ocean where the waters rest. During his southern passage, his path is over the Vindhyas. He floats in the sky like a boat. He is the home of heat; he is spherical in shape; he is the destroyer of foes; he is yellow when he rises, he makes all things glow with heat at noon; he brings out and teaches sciences like grammar; (the *Sruti* says that there is nothing that he knows not). He rules the world. (Mighty in his lustre; overcomes all enemies). His love encompasses all beings; (He causes them to rejoice). From him all creatures derive their life. He is the sovereign of the stars and planets (The heavens, the sky and the sun, moon and the stars, the quarters, the earth and the vast oceans, all these are held together for work and use through the energy of Vasudeva-*Vishnusahasranama;* It is he that establishes the universe). He is brighter than all the other radiant gods (since the *sruti* tells us" he, through whom the sun receives his radiance and shines"; he is the son of our sun). Indra, Dhata, Bhaga, Pushan, Mitra, Varuna, Aryama, Archis, Vivasvan, Tvashtha, Savita and Vishnu are his twelve forms. He is the centre of these twelve globes). And to you, thus manifest, do I bow in reverence.

(Aditya : The *upanishad* says, "He receives everything into himself. So he is named Aditya". That is why he makes all matter manifest.

Savita : He is the source from which springs the entire universe or he is its ruler.

Surya : He impels all beings to act; he is Paramatman. "He is in all beings as their ruler, he is the inner ruler of all beings" — *sruti*.

Khaga : The vedic text tells us, "he shines in the highest *akasa* as the ruler of these worlds".

Pushan : He has the universe under his protection.

Gabhastiman : He is eternally associated with Lakshmi who is all-pervading. "Even as Mahavishnu so is Mahalakshmi, all-pervading." *Vishnupurana.*

Suparna: This is another reading of Suvarna. He is the Paramatman according to the *sruti.* Two birds are there of fine plumage, ever uniting and residing upon the same tree.

Tapana : Himself sound asleep, he consumes his foes by his energy.

Hiranyaretas : The *Manusmriti* tells us, 'He evoled at first as Prakriti in the form of waters and therein did he let his energy pervade. It turned itself into this Brahmanda, golden in hue like millions of suns. So he is the golden germ or the seed that evolves this Brahmanda.

Divakara : He dispels the darkness of ignorance in all beings and lets in the light of knowledge.

Haridasva : He rides upon the Garuda, lovely to view.

Sahasrarchi : He is endowed with countless perfection.

Saptasapti: This hints at the Kalki Avatara.

Marichiman : He carries with him the weapons, conch, the disc and the mace to destroy his foes.

Timironmathana : He wards off all obstacles in the way of the dawn of wisdom consistently with the *sruti* text. He abides in the hearts of all and is the dearest friend destroying their ill-fortune and grief.

Sambhu : The *sruti,* "He spreads joy and happiness all round", tells us that he has eyes everywhere.

Tvashta : The Parasurama Avatara is hinted at here as it means that he cleared the earth of *Kshatriyas,* the warrior clans thrice seven times.

Amsuman : The *sruti* tells us 'Narayana pervades everything in and out".

Hiranyagarbha : He contains in himself all these worlds and the *Sruti* has it that, "the Hiranyagarbha was the only one at the beginning".

Tapana : He causes danger and grief to those that are the foes of his dependents.

Bhaskara : It was he that fashioned the worlds whereby one can come into contact with all things directly.

Agnigarbha : The *sruti* tells us that Rudra came from Narayana. So he has in his womb the Rudra that is the fire of dissolution.

Sankha : He is boundless bliss-incarnate.

Sisiranasana : He destroys the mist and cold as the sun.

Vyomanatha : As the Tamasa Ahankara he evolves the Akasa Tatva; the Akasa springs from the Atman *(sruti).*

Tamobhedi : He destroys the darkness of ignorance in the heart of his devotees.

Samparaga : He is the end and finality of all *Vedas.* The *Gita* tells us, "I am He that is known throughout as the Vedas". Again the *Bhagavatapurana* says that Krishna the Paramatman is the eternal *Dharma* as taught by those that have mastered the inner mysteries of the *Vedas* and have realised in its entirety the nature and constitution of Brahman.

Ghanavrishti : He pours down like the rains the results of all actions. The *Gita* tells us, "I receive all *yajnas,* and I am the lord thereof."

Apammitra : I recline on the vast sheet of waters during the period of dissolution; the *sruti* tells us, "he is the one whom the wise ones behold in the midst of the oceans".

Vindyavithi : He leads the soul quickly and easily through the *nadi* known as the Sushumna, that is hard to pass along at the time of the departure of the *jiva* from the body. It is he that rewards us with liberation. He leads these *jivas* to the presence of Brahman. It is through his grace and his presence in the heart that the soul leaves this body through the *nadi* Sushumna which is the one after the hundred such that rises from the heart.

Atapi : It is he that plans and revolves the evolutions of these worlds. The *sruti* tells us that his meditation takes the form of wisdom.

Mandali : he is adorned with the jewel Kaustubha.

Mrityu : He is the dweller in the God Mrityu, as the *sruti* has it.

Pingala : Though great and mighty beyond compare, he is endowed with divine trait of extreme affability that shows itself in his moving so freely and on equal terms with the souls that set themselves up through ignorance against him.

(Sarvatapana : He destroys this universe in an instant).

Salutations unto you enthroned on the eastern mountain of sunrise; Salutations to you enthroned on the Western mountain of sunset. Salutations to you the lord of the globes of light and ruler of the day (This hints that he is the ruler of the liberated ones shining in their lustres). Salutations to you who confers success on your devotees and bestows all good; to you who is drawn by black horses. Salutations to you of resistless prowess; You destroy bodily and mental ills of those that adore you and bless them with everything good and holy. You ride on the shoulders of Hanuman; (this hints at the *avatara* as Rama). Salutations to you who contains in himself countless millions of souls. You are Aditya in manifestation (the *Gita* says, "it is my essence known as the *jivas* in their world"). You are harsh and severe to those that seek you not. You impell all beings towards their actions. You travel through two thousand *yojanas* in half a second.

And unto you go forth my salutations. I bow unto you who are above Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra, the Lords of manifestation, function, and involution. You are the Supreme Brahman itself. You are the sun manifest. You proclaim as Aditya, your boundless light and glory; you withdraw into yourself the entire universe; and to you I bow in reverence as Rudra on the occasion(The *sruti* tells us "this Aditya is verily Brahmins. The Lord Janardana himself takes the names and forms of Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra, that function as the fashioner, the conductor, and the destroyer of worlds - *smriti*. To him the Brahmins, and the Kshatriyas are food, says, the *sruti*. The terrible form he takes on when destroying his foes hints at his *avatara* as Narasimha. I salute you, who dispels darkness; you deal death to the enemies of those who take refuge in you, you chase away mist and dew; the form that you assume is boundless; you are destroyer of ungrateful men. Your radiance and splendour is something peculiar and apart; you are the Lord of everything that blazes and shines. You are of the colour of molten gold. You distribute to the gods their share of offerings as the Lord Agni; You are the maker of all the worlds. You remove the darkness of ignorance; you are mercy incarnate; you are the inner ruler of all beings and the witness of their merits and sins (From the name Sarvadevatmaka, "the soul of all the Gods" upto Lokasakshi, "the witness of everything" are the *mantras* numbering 108 contained in this praise known as *Adityahridaya*. Having thus instructed Rama, the *rishi* again praises the Supreme Lord, who is the presiding deity thereof).

"He destroys the worlds on the day of the great dissolution and brings it again into being. He is the protector of everything and causes the waters to dry up. It is he that burns up everything. It is he that brings us the rains through his rays. It is he that is ever awake and alert as the inner ruler of all beings when they are withdrawn into the state of Sushupti, dreamless sleep. He is the fire sacrifice and the fruit thereof. (He enables men to conduct these rites. He takes unto himself the rites and gives them the rewards thereof). It is he that should be known by all beings; It is he that is adored by *yajna, yaga* and such like ceremonies. He is the presiding deity of all worldly acts. He brings their results as the Lord of all. As this Aditya is all powerful and all mighty. Raghava! If a man would meditate upon the god and sing his praise in times of danger and difficulty, in lonely forest, in moments of impending fear, nothing happens to him amiss. So concentrate your thoughts and adore with devotion this God of Gods, this Lord of the boundless universe. This hymn of praise, *Adityahridaya,* recited three times brings you victory in battle. This very moment will you slay Ravana''. Having thus instructed Rama, the *Maharishi* Agastya went back to his place.

Raghava, of matchless radiance, cast away his weariness of heart. He listened to it and kept it in memory most gladly with senses and mind well under control. He purified himself, sipped the holy water thrice, recited the *mantras* duly with his soul and heart centred upon Aditya; boundless joy filled his heart. His valour and splendour grew apace. He took a good look at Ravana who faced him; his heart danced with joy and delight; and he decided within himself to slay his foe in battle and put his heart in the work.

The Lord of the Day cast a look of supreme affection at Rama, who praised him there. He was supremely pleased at his devotion and the praise; his hair stood on end as he said ''This lord of the *rakshasas* has met his fate''. With this blessing he addressed himself to Rama from his place among the gods on high and said ''Rama lose no time in sending Ravana to his doom''. (The sun came down from his orb to have a better view of the battle and stood in the sky near to the place taken by Rama in the battlefield and blessed him with the fruit of his devotional hymn). But later on we find that Brahma, Rudra and Indra and others proclaim with one voice that Rama was the Lord Narayana himself and so he is greater than the greatest, the Lord Vishnu. But here we find that the sun is described as being endowed with all such perfections. The solution to this problem is — In the *Chandogyopanishad* we find that Aditya is the presiding deity of the Madhuvidya; however, it is the inner ruler of the sun, the Supreme Lord that should be adored thereby; he is verily the objective thereof as the *Maharishi* Vedavyasa teaches us in the *Brahmasutras*.. So this praise has as its objective deity the Supreme Lord that is the inner ruler of Aditya himself. This story of Rama teaches us from the beginning to the end that the Lord Narayana is the Supreme One.

CHAPTER 108

RAVANA MEETS WITH EVIL PORTENTS

THEN driver of Ravana brought his car swiftly to the place. It filled the hearts of the foes with terror; it looked like floating clouds, palaces and cities in the sky; its flags and banners scraped the heavens above: Horses adorned with garlands of gold and of noble breed were yoked to it. It was plentifully supplied with bows, arrows, armours, swords, shields, maces, and other weapons; it was gaily decked with streamers and pennons; it gave one the idea that it swallowed the entire firmament; its tread caused the earth to quake. It was quite capable by itself of destroying the enemies' hosts and causing joy and delight to wax in the hearts of its own men. (Varahamihira in his *Samhita* tells us that if there appeared in the sky palaces, mansions, courts, towers of varied shapes and colours and adorned with banners, garlands and chaplets, it is given the name of the city of *gandharvas.* Terrible battle between kings attended with destruction of countless elephants, horses, cars, and infantry is the concomitant of this portent). Raghuvira noted that the car of the *rakshasa* ruler drove at him with frightful speed, while the earth and the quarters trembled in affright. Drawn by jet-black horses with baleful lustre, adorned with a flag like unto lambent lightning, it caught the attention of Rama; weapons like unto those of Indra himself shone therein, as it drew near like rain-clouds spreading themselves over the sky. Then he grasped his bow, ready, strong, and brilliant as the crescent moon; and twanged it so that the thunder resembled the shattering of mountains by Indra's bolt. Then he turned to Matali and said, *Behold, Ravana comes upon us in his car with frightful speed; he drives on the wrong side and it is a sure sign that he seeks his death in this battle; so take the car carefully right in front of him; I would destroy him today and his car like unto a storm at the wake of fleeting clouds. Drive on with enthusiasm; take no chances; do not be disturbed in thought or look; hold the reins steadily and with care. In fact it is entirely un-called for that I should give you directions when you have driven the car of Indra. But I have set myself to fight with undivided attention a most mighty foe and it is why I remind you of this. Do not take it that I instruct you in things that you know not''. Matali was mightily pleased thereat. He drove his car on the wrong side of Ravana's conveyance and hid him behind the cloud of dust raised by the wheels. That caused Ravana to blaze with wrath. He rolled his eyes frightfully and gave Rama before him a hot time of it with his shafts. Raghava was not behind-hand in fury; he grasped most valiantly the bow sent him by Indra and the arrows blazing like the sun.

Then both stood up to one another, intent upon a mortal fight, like two lions in their prime. *Devas, gandharvas, siddhas,* and *maharshis* prayed for the death of Ravana and gathered there to behold the dreadful fight. Then there were seen ill-omens indicating the death of Ravana and the victory of Raghava. Clouds rained blood on the car of the *rakshasa,* whirlwinds raged keen and fiercely revolved on the wrong side. Huge vultures, banded themselves above and followed his car. (The *Sakunarnava* tells us that birds of ill-omen like the vulture, circle over the head of him upon whom death has laid its hand). Lanka and the land around was bathed in blood-red sunset and looked like a sheet of fire at night. Meteors, comets, and thunders indicated the impending fate of Ravana. The *rakshasas* quaked in terror; dreadful earthquakes followed the steps of Ravana. His men were powerless to use their weapons, as if someone threw them back. The rays of the sun lit up the body of Ravana, red, white, and black in hue like unto mountain slopes lined with ores of varied colours. Jackals vomited flames and looked inauspiciously with their gaze on the face of Ravana; eagles and vultures cried most frightfully, a strong wind beat against him and blinded him with the dust. His armies were afflicted all over, by thunderbolts, roaring dreadfully, but without any clouds in sight. All directions were covered with dust and darkness and the sky itself was hid from view. *Sarikas* (birds) fought ceaselessly in groups and came towards the car with frightful cries. The horses shed tears; and from the quarters arose sparks of fire. Thus were seen ill-omens betokening the approach of the death of Ravana. Likewise there were seen good omens indicating the coming victory of Rama. His heart was gladdened thereat mightily and he concluded that Ravana was dead.

Raghava, an adept in the science of omens, noted carefully the good and the evil signs beneficial to himself and unlucky to Ravana; his hair stood on end with joy. Boundless delight filled his heart and he displayed supreme valour and prowess in the fight.

CHAPTER 109

RAMA AND RAVANA

WHEN Rama and Ravana took their seats on divine cars and carried on a dreadful fight that caused all beings to quake with terror. The contending forces themselves stood motionless eager to watch the fight, with their arms idle. When the heroes began the fight in earnest all lost themselves in following it and were filled with boundless surprise. Those that were about to discharge their weapons stood there motionless. Wonder caused them to forbore themselves and they forgot to strike or defend. They fixed their gaze on their leaders and resembled painted figures on the canvass with unwinking eyes. The warriors themselves watched very carefully the signs, cast away fear and then fought on with clear brains and willing hands while uncontrollable anger drove them on. "I should win" said Raghupati to himself, "I should die a glorious death" said Ravana to himself. They plucked up courage from danger and displayed everything they knew in that fight.

Then Ravana shot some rare arrows at the banner on the car of Raghava. But they were prevented from touching it by the protective power attached to the car and fell on the earth away from it. Rama was wroth thereat and wanted to pay him in his own coin. He bent his bow and shot a keen shaft at the banner on the car of Ravana; like unto a lordly serpent it was blazing in its radiance and was impossible to stay; it failed not in its purpose and brought down the banner of the *rakshasa*. Ravana was lapped all over in flames as it were by his mad fury and looked as if he would consume everything. That mighty one lashed by indescribable wrath shot many a keen arrow and hit the horses yoked to the car of Indra. But they were horses of heavenly breed, they blenched not, nor moved a hair's breadth; in fact the shafts were comfortable and soothing to them as if they were lotus stalks. Thereat Ravana brought down another deluge of arrows through the might of his magic. Then from his arrows sprung maces, bolts, wheels, pestles, mountain peaks, trees, tridents and axes. All creatures shook with fear as the downpour kept on with frightful speed and dreadful roar. Thus did he hide from view the car of Raghava; but he made short work of the shower. This made Ravana to give rest for a while to the car and turned his attack on the monkey-host incessantly, with uniform energy and spirit. With unabated courage, did Raghunatha return the attack and pave the earth, the sky, and the quarters. He noted that Ravana set his heart in his work, warlike fury mastered him, and he was waxing visibly. So he laughed lightly, strung his bow, and set up a ceaseless deluge of arrows, one, ten, hundred and thousand in number. In his turn Ravana displayed the same skill and covered the firmament above with his arrows leaving no pin-point space. These arrowy downpours hid the light of the firmament from view and presented another sky. Every arrow hit its mark or they dashed against one another and fell on the ground. Thus did Rama and Ravana carry on coursing now right, now left, filling the sky till it struggled for breath. The horses that drew the cars did not escape the attention of the heroes. Their anger grew and grew; their martial spirit kept pace. The beholders trembled in affright and their hairs stood on end as these mighty heroes kept up the fight, unweary with keen shafts. Ravana was filled with uncontrollable wrath at Raghupati, who brought down the banner on his car.

CHAPTER 110

RAVANA'S HEADS SHORN OFF

ALL beings stood in confusion and surprise as they beheld this remarkable battle between the two. The cars themselves dashed against each other with frightful speed. The drivers caught the contagion and kept up a mortal fight using their vehicles as weapons. Turning back right and left, round, and round they coursed with the speed of lightning, displayed every trick and mode and feint they knew and it was dreadful to behold. None could follow the course when Rama hit Ravana and fell back or when Ravana returned the compliment with the speed of thought. Like huge cloud-banks during the rains did the cars pour forth a ceaseless torrent of weapons and rang in the sky that was to them the field of battle. Having thus given a taste of their mastery of the vehicles, they stood up against each other again. Wheel and wheel, yoke and yoke, axle and axle, horses and horses clashed together with dreadful impact.

Rama bent his bow and hit the horses of Ravana with four shafts and hurled them back. Ravana wroth beyond words, hit Rama with keen shafts that passed clean through him. But this afflicted him not in the least. Though Ravana put all his force behind it, his face did not turn pale, Ravana then turned his attention to Matali, the driver of Indra, and shot dreadful arrows like unto *vajras.* They passed through his body, but caused him no pain nor clouded his brain, Rama cared little for his enemy's attacks on him. But this deliberate side-shot at his driver maddened him and at the same time filled him with shame. So he set his heart on his work and caused Ravana to seek refuge from the arrowy torrent; twenty, thirty, sixty, hundred, thousand, with countless arrows did Rama hit the car of the Ravana unremittingly. Ravana did not draw back but kept up a never ending attack against Rama with club, bar, bolt, and spear.

The battle that followed was even more terrible and ghastly. The seven seas were stirred up through the sounds of the arrowy deluge and of the maces, bars, bolts, and other weapons hurled through the air ceaselessly. The very inhabitants of the lower worlds, the *pannagas,danavas,* and the rest suffered extreme distress. The earth, the mountains, the forests and the woods shook to their foundation; the sun grew dim; air stood still. Then the *devas,* the *gandharvas,* the *siddhas, kinnaras* and *uragas* cried, "This is wonderful beyond belief; neither of the two shows any signs of weariness". They were mightily anxious whether Rama would win, would chop of his head and pierce his vitals. The *devarshis* kept up a ceaseless prayer and recitations, "May good be with the cows, may the worlds be not destroyed, may Rama defeat Ravana in the battle" and thus they kept watchful eyes on the fight. *Gandharvas* and *apsaras* came there in groups, beheld that marvellous fight and cried, "The sky has nothing to compare it with except the sky; the ocean has nothing to compare it with except the oceans. Even so, the battle betweeen Rama and Ravana can only be compared with the battle between Rama and Ravana".

Then the best and bravest of the Raghu race took up an arrow named Kshura, set it on the string and sent it at Ravana with terrible wrath; and he brought down the head of the *rakshasa*-ruler with the crown and ear-rings that graced it. The three worlds gazed at it with all their souls. But the next moment here was another head at the same place, identical with it. Rama cut away that too with one of his keen shafts. But there was another in its place at once. Raghava kept up this game with arrows like unto the bolts of Indra and one hundred and one heads lay on the earth. One cannot be distinguished from the other in size, colour, shape, lustre or ornaments. And there was no knowing the path to the destruction of the *rakshasa* nor the end of his long life with this successive decapitation. The arrows of Rama were athirst during long years to drink the blood of the *rakshasa's* heart and it was but to fulfil their wishes. (We should note that Ravana appeared during the fight with only a single head and a pair of arms. That is why Valmiki tells us that he lay on the earth with two arms outspread adorned with rare ornaments — Govindaraja. But we have it again that Dasagriva towers aloft in the battle-field like the mountain Mainaka with ten heads and twenty arms, brandishing mighty bows. We might explain it that it was the main head that was so often cut off-Tirtha). Then Rama felt rather anxious and said to himself "There is nothing

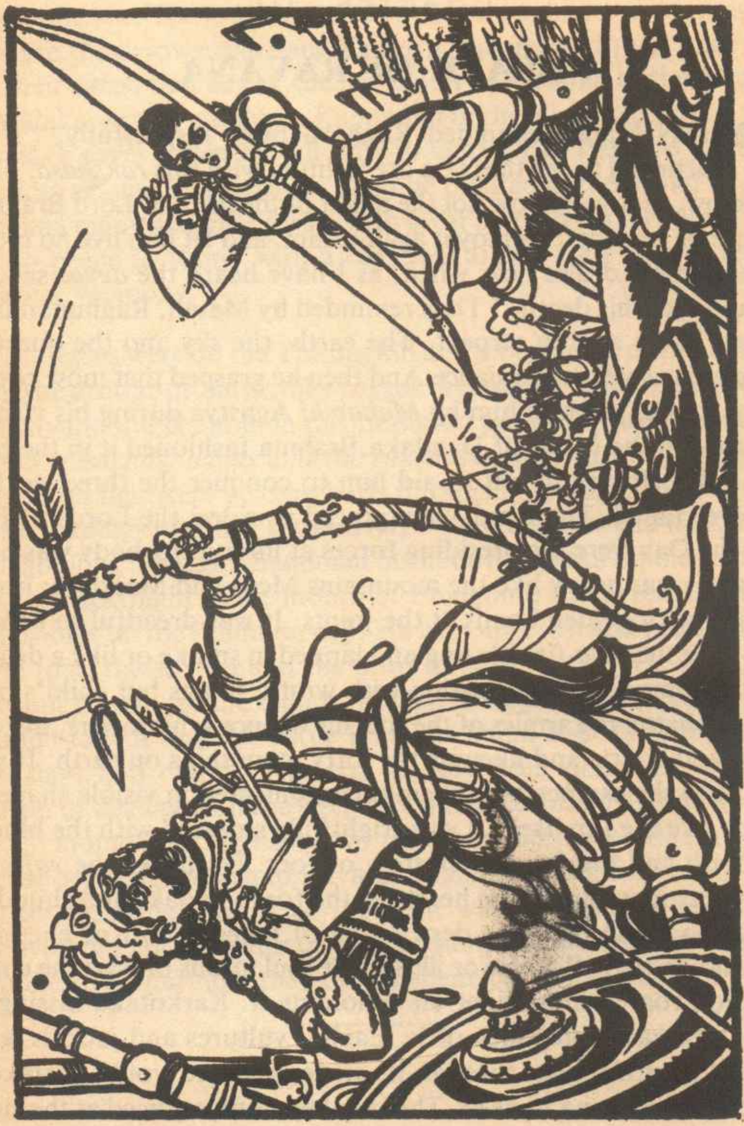
I know not about the qualities of human and divine weapons: I have mastered the secrets of discharging them effectively and dealing death to the foe. These are the arrows that brought down Maricha. These are the arrows that sent Khara, Dushana and their clan to meet their fates; that drank the life blood of Viradha in the forest of Dandaka — that cut down Kabandha in the Krauncha forest — these have never failed me till now in battle. But they are utterly powerless against this Ravana. Then he planted in the broad chest of Ravana many a mighty arrow with great care. In his turn Ravana gave no peace to Rama with a ceaseless attack with maces, bars and other weapons.

The heroes were on the Trikuta hill at the beginning of the fight. But in the ardour of battle they forgot themselves and ranged over the earth and the sky and on the mountain peaks. *Devas, danavas, yakshas, pisachas, nagas and the rakshasas* were eager to witness the dreadful fight kept up ceaselessly through that long night. (There are two readings meaning respectively — seven nights and days and that night long through. Hanuman burnt down Lanka on the fourth day of the fortnight in the month of Phalguna; Rama reached the ocean shores on the fullmoon day. He kept up a fast and meditation on the first, the second and the third days following. He went up to Mount Suvela on the eighth, the battle began on the ninth; so we might take it that the battle between Rama and Ravana lasted seven days and nights. This has already been discussed on the occasion of dealing with the sleep of Kumbhakarna). Not one hour, not one moment in the day or in the night did the battle slacken or cease between Rama and Ravana. Matali who followed with his soul the changing aspects of the fight was surprised to see that Raghuvira did not get better of his foe visibly. Most wise, intelligent, he spoke to Rama now that the moment for it had come.

CHAPTER 111

DEATH OF RAVANA

THEN Matali reminded Raghava most respectfully, "I am surprised to see that you are fighting with this *rakshasa,* blow for blow, as if you know not the might of the *astra* of Lord Brahma. Prince of warriors; employ it against him, and let him live no more. The moment draws near when, as I have heard the *devas* say, he should meet his death." Thus reminded by Matali, Raghunandana hissed like a mighty serpent. The earth, the sky and the quarters were ablaze with his radiance.And then he grasped that most potent *astra.* It was given to him by *Maharshi* Agastya during his visit to the sage in the forest of Dandaka.Brahma fashioned it in the past for Indra. It was meant to aid him to conquer the three worlds. It never failed. The Lord Vayu graced its sides; the Lords of Fire and the Day were the presiding forces at its end. Its body was pure *akasa;* it was heavy like the mountains Meru and Mandara; it was decked with golden bands at the joints. It was dreadful to behold like unto the *kala*-fire blazing and lapped in smoke or like a deadly and venomous serpent hissing with wrath; it was but child's play to it to shatter the armies of the foe, his weapons, his towers, turrets, gates and courts and likewise the lofty mountains on earth. It was like unto the essence of all beings concentrated in visible shape; it shone like the sun itself; it was frightfully smeared with the blood, the flesh and the fat, the marrow of foes. Hard like the *vajra* of Indra, its roar caused the hearts of the foes to quake and shudder, it had to its account the destruction of many a host of enemies. It could destroy all magic or illusion or foul means of war; the entire creation roared in affright on beholding it. Karkotaka hissing in his wrath gave some idea of it. Eagles, vultures and jackals were sure of plentiful feast through its grace; and one would mistake it for the Lord Yama himself. The monkey-hosts rejoiced at the sight of it. The *rakshasas* were filled with despair. It was the king of all *astras;* the feathers of the very Lord Garuda winged it. It warded off fear from the hearts of the kings of the Ikshvaku race. It made short work of the fame of foes. It was the source of boundless joy



to him that owned it. The mighty Rama chanted over it the *mantras* laid down for the purpose in the *Vedas,* and set it on the string. Then all beings trembled with fear; the earth tottered to its roots. Raghuvira was beside himself with wrath like unto Lord Rudra on the day of Dissolution; he bent his mighty bow, drew the string to his ear and shot it most carefully that it may cleave the heart and vitals of his foe.

He put behind it the strength and force of his arms, like unto the *vajra* of Indra; like unto the *vajra* itself none can ward it; and like the Lord Yama, that brings all things to their destruction, it fell on the broad chest of Ravana. Shot with irresistible speed and force,that shaft clove the heart of the wicked Ravana, and destroyed the body. It drank up the life-breaths of the *rakshasa* in a moment and wet with his blood made its way into the earth. Thus did it slay Ravana. Shining with his blood on it, it effected its purpose and came back to its place in the quiver of Rama with supreme respect and reverence. The bow and the arrows fell from the hands of Ravana. Thus lost to life and unable to save himself, like unto the Asura Vritra, felled down by the *vajra* of Indra, that ruler of the *rakshasa*-world of boundless lustre and power fell on the earth from his car, a lifeless corpse. Those of the *rakshasas* that were alive beheld it; there was none to lead them; they were in the grip of fear unspeakable; and they sought safety and refuge in all directions. The monkeys made the earth and the sky tremble with their shouts of joy at the death of Ravana and the victory of Rama. They chased the retreating *rakshasas* with trees and mountains. The *rakshasas* were clean dazed with fear, with none to look upto, they hid themselves all through Lanka with wan faces and streaming eyes. On the otherside the monkeys were equally beside themselves with extreme joy. Their forms grew in bulk with the consciousness of victory; and they kept up shouts and cries and roars, repeating the news of the death of Ravana and the victory of Rama. War drums of the heaven world thundered in the sky. A cool and pleasant breeze blew, heavy with perfume. Flowers rained from the sky. Raghava and his car were clean hid by that rare and sweet deluge. The hosts of the heaven worlds praised Rama most joyfully, crying "Good! Good!".The death of Ravana, who held the worlds in mortal terror caused the *devas, gandharvas, siddhas,* and *charanas* to be delirious with joy. Raghava gladdened the hearts of Sugriva and Angada; with his victory over the *rakshasa*-ruler, they had realised their utmost hopes. (They were waiting to return somewhat the benefits they had received from Rama; and they rejoiced to see that their efforts were crowned with success). Then the hosts of heaven cast away their fears and rejoiced. The quarters were clear and light; the sky shone spotlessly.The earth shook not; the winds blew not fierce but soft and pleasant. Lakshmana, Vibhishana, Sugriva, Jambavan and the other friends of Raghava revelled in boundless delight at the success of the arms of Rama and offered due worship to him, who shone with the radiance of victory. Ramabhadra slew his foe and made his word good. He shone with blinding splendour in the midst of his friends and armies like unto Mahendra adored by the hosts of Heaven.

CHAPTER 112

THE LAMENT OF VIBHISHANA

Vibhishana beheld his brother Ravana defeated by Rama, and lying on the ground a lifeless corpse; and cried and wailed out of uncontrollable grief. "Pearless Lord of boundless prowess! feared far and near through the worlds! master of every science and art! adept in the mysteries of kingship! You used to take your rest on the beds of swan feathers covered with fragrant flowers divested of their stalks; has it come to this that you quit your hold upon life on the rough bare earth like a fallen thing? Your arms are spread awry, that resemble the trunks of elephants, and adorned with diverse ornaments of rare make; your crown has fallen away from your brows. Was it in your fate to lie here, all unseemly and still, as if the Lord of Day had fallen headlong from his place on high? My words to you spoken on that day have now come true. Lust and pride maddened your brain and you made light of my well-meant counsel. Prahasta, Indrajit, Kumbhakarna, Atikaya, Narantaka and the other *rakshasa*-heroes, not to speak of your own self made light of that dead whose result has now come to you, not to be set aside. Alas! you were the last word in the science of polity, you were *dharma* incarnate; you were the head and heart of strength and valour; you were worthy of all praise; and you have met your fate today. And those excellences are now adrift with no one to dwell in.This Lord has to his account Agnihotras; and the Lord of Day that gives life and light to the worlds, has this day fallen head long from his place on high. The Queen of Night has sunk in blind darkness shorn of her rays. The Lord of fire , is now a dull cloud. Energy and enthusiasm are now idle and listless. All these and much more have come true, now that the famed Lord of Lanka, the gem on the crown of warriors is no more and a lifeless corpse measuring his length on the bare earth.

Lo! Ravana, the best and the bravest of the *rakshasa*-world, is worsted by his foe and rolls in the dust. A mighty huge tree is uprooted and spread on the ground by a terrible whirl-wind. The mighty *rakshasa* is the tree and Rama is the whirl-wind. Valour is the root of that great tree, *tapas* is its strength, cheer is its flower, and courage is its tender leaves. Ravana, the mad elephant, lies mauled by Rama, the lion. The tusks are his fame, the hind part is his heredity, the limbs are his anger and the trunk is his favour.The ten-headed Ravana is the fire that has been put out by Rama the cloud. Valour and cheerfulness are the flames, the breath is the smoke, the strength is the heat. The mighty and valorous bull of a Ravana has been killed by Raghuvira, the tiger. The *rakshasas* are the tails and horns of the bull''.

Thus did Vibhishana, unable to bear the sorrow, wail the death of Ravana in words, reasonable and appropriate. Hearing him thus wail, Rama said ''Friend! he was valorous and dreadful in battle, had unbounded cheer and optimism. Do not think that he has been vanquished in battle as an ordinary weakling. Rest assured that he died after performing valorous deeds, praiseworthy in every respect. No need to weep for those who are true Kshatriyas and have lost their lives in battle, fighting with all their valour and desirous of reaching heaven by death in battle true and straight. Dead though they be, they live eternally in name and fame, Ravana was very intelligent; had conquered the three worlds, the *devas* and Indra. He had ascended to the *Virasvarga* and has won everlasting fame.

This is not the time to feel for his end, an end which has to be reached by one and all by the passage of time. We have not heard of any one who has been always successful in battle. A true warrior is either killed or kills his foes in battle. To kill or to be killed in fight is an universal *dharma*. Our ancients have praised and lauded high the death of a warrior in battle. Kshatriyas have accepted this. I therefore opine that the death of a Kshatriya in battle, after he has fought valiantly without ever turning his back to his foe should never be wailed. You will therefore understand this truth and knowing that every thing born has to die, proceed to think of the steps to be taken hereafter."

Addressed thus by Sri Rama, descendant of the line of Ikshvakus and the *avatara* of *Dharma* and fame, Vibhishana, with sorrow unabated, spoke thus about the rites to be performed for his brother. "*Devas* and Indra together could not defeat Ravana in battle. That great hero was killed in battle by facing you, even as the ocean waves die out on the shores. He has numberless charitable deeds to his credit. He has worshipped the *devas* and masters with all the might of his heart. He has enjoyed all the pleasures in life. He has favoured all his followers. He had endowed his friends with riches and prosperity. He has avenged himself many a time on his foes. He has performed the Agnihotra ceaselessly. He is mighty of *tapas,* well-versed in the *Vedas,* has accomplished Vedic rites according to the standard rules and regulations, I await your orders to perform his last rites, worthy of a true warrior without an equal, great in the path of *dharma,* famous in the performance of Agnihotra, to enable him to attain the noblest salvation in the worlds beyond. His brothers, his sons and his nearest kith and kin are all dead and gone. I am the only surviving member of his family and the duty of performing the last ceremonies devolves therefore on me".

Raghuvira heard Vibhishana's piteous and humble prayer and ordered the last rites to be performed. "Vibhishana! we should not abandon the last rites due to him, though there was enmity between you and him. It would not be proper. All enmity should end with death. It is not justice to continue to bear ill-will towards one who is dead. We came here to redeem Sita. That object has been achieved. Obsequies due for Ravana should be paid. He is your brother. You are a great friend of mine and therefore your brother is a brother to me also. If you refuse to do the last ceremonies because he was evil-minded, I shall not hesitate to do the rites myself. Anyone of the brothers has the authority to do the last ceremonies."

CHAPTER 113

LAMENT OF LADIES IN THE HAREM

MEANWHILE, the news that Ravana was killed by Rama reached the royal ladies and they were plunged in the depth of grief. With hair dishevelled and robes and ornaments falling off, they rushed out of the harem. Caring not for the words of any one, they rolled on the ground and wept bitterly, even as a cow that has lost her calf. Followed by the *rakshasas* they entered the battle-field through the Northern gate in quest of their lord and husband. "Ha! Our King! Ha! our Lord! they cried, and cast their searching glances all round on the field filled with headless trunks. Left unprotected by the death of their lord, like the she-elephants of the forests that have lost their mates, they cried bitterly and wept with tears streaming down their cheeks. After a long while they saw their lord of mighty prowess and limitless splendour lying prostrate on the ground like a black mountain. Finding their lord's body lying on the bare dusty ground, they fell on it like rootless creepers and fainted. One of them out of her regard and devotion to him wept aloud and embraced him; one placed the feet of Ravana on her head and wept; one clung to his neck and cried; one took his arms, placed them on herself and rolled on the ground; one swooned looking intently on his face; one placed his head on her lap and cried aloud, her tears falling on his face even as the dew drops on the lotus. Thus they wept and cried for long, rolled on the ground and beat their breasts, having lost the king of the *rakshasas,* who was their lord, mate, husband and king. "Alas! you made Indra tremble even in his slumber. The destroyer of all creations, Yama himself, went underground afraid of you. Vanquished by you, Kubera, your brother, the favourite friend of Paramasiva, lost his Pushpaka car to you. The *gandharvas, rishis,* and the *devas* trembled at the mere mention of your name! Has it come to this that you of such name and fame should now lie thus on the battle-field? You had no need to dread the *asuras,* the *danavas,* the *daityas* and the hosts of *devas.* How did you meet with death at the hands of mere mortals! You, who could not be killed by the most powerful *deva, danava, yaksha* and *gandharva*-hosts, were you destined to die at the hands of a man, who had not even a chariot and had to stand on the ground! All the created beings of the three worlds could not trouble you. How have you yielded today to an ordinary mortal who has no name or a place of his own?'' Thus they wailed and mourned their Lord, praising his prowess, greatness and valour.

''Alas! not minding the advice of friends who had your welfare at heart you brought Sita here. Thereby you sought your own death. You have brought about the eradication of the *rakshasa*-race. You and we and all our kinsfolk have perished. Your brother, Vibhishana, did he not on many an occasion entreat you to restore Sita? Rejecting his counsel, you drove him out of Lanka with harsh and cruel words. What else have you achieved but to drive your good fortune and bring destruction on yourself? Had you sent back Sita even then, would such a fate have overtaken us? Would the *rakshasa*-line have been swept away like this? Vibhishana would have been mightily pleased. Rama, his friend, would have become the friend of the *rakshasas.* This widowhood would not have befallen us. Your enemies, the *devas,* would not then have danced with joy, as they do now. You, the *rakshasas* and ourselves earned our destruction even at the time when Sita was forcibly brought here with tears in her eyes, fear and sorrow in her heart. Ha! Chief of the *rakshasas!* What is the use of blaming you! Created beings cannot have things happening according to their own wish. Fate is the only cause of all that happens. One's death is first ordained by Fate and then only one meets with death outwardly at the hands of one's enemy. It has been destined that countless *rakshasas* and *vanaras* and yourself should die in this great battle. What is the use of possessing riches, power and prowess enough to subdue others? Can all these avail against Fate?'' Thus did the ladies of Ravana wail woefully like the *krauncha* bird that has lost her mate.

CHAPTER 114

THE LAMENT OF MANDODARI

AS the wives of Ravana were weeping for their lord, Mandodari, the chief, among them looked long at the body of her husband and moaned deeply. She knew full well that the true warrior, who meets with death fighting fearlessly in battle without turning his back is rewarded with the highest bliss. But she grieved bitterly with shame that her lord was vanquished and killed by a mere man, who was no equal to him. Beholding the king of Lanka lying low slain by Rama, whose exploits were countless and unimaginable, the desolate Mandodari mourned helplessly : "Oh king of kings! Wonder of wonders! Kubera, the friend of your family deity Mahadeva, is your brother. Before your angered self can the *maharshis,* the *gandharvas,* the *siddhas, charanas,* the guardians of the regions and all those that live in the three worlds, including Indra himself stand? All the world knows this. Have not the *charanas,* in fear of you fled? This too the world knows. How then did this man roaming about in the forest kill you? Is it not shameful that this has happened to you? Oh mightiest of the *rakshasas!* How did this mere man, a wandering ascetic who lives on roots and fruits and wears matted locks and deer skin and the bark of trees, how did such a man vanquish you who had mastered all the three worlds with your valour, power and riches? How did he kill you, whose prowess none could withstand? Your city of Lanka is surrounded on all sides by the ocean, built on the top of the Chitrakuta hill, guarded by the mighty *rakshasas* day and night; and none can penetrate into it. I cannot believe what they say that Rama overpowered you, mighty, skilled and fully armed as you were.

"Whose exploit then could this be? This is not a thing to be accomplished by a mere man. That Rama was no man was clear to me even then when it was reported at Janasthana he killed single-handed and in a short space of time, Khara, Dushana, Trisiras and a host of other *rakshasas*. I was deeply perturbed when I heard that an ordinary monkey pierced through the defences of Lanka, which had been impregnable even to the gods, killed many *rakshasa*-heroes and destroyed the city. When the mighty *vanaras* built the dam across the ocean, I knew Rama was no mortal. Perhaps the God of Death himself came as Rama, luring you to your destruction by creating an illusory Sita with unequalled beauty and charm. Could it be that Indra, the king of the Gods, who had been vanquished and disgraced by you, came in this disguise to kill you? No it could not be for he knows how weak he is, face to face with you."

"Truly this is He that has the well-being of all in His Heart, the Paramatma, He who is without beginning, middle and end, mighty beyond the mightiest, the creator greater than the *devas* and the lord Brahmadeva; this is Mahavishnu, the valorous, who carried the conch, the disc, and the mace, who has Srivatsa on his breast, the protector of all the Universe, who is never separated from Mahalakshmi; really Rama the mortal man, is the incarnation of Sriman Narayana, the Lord of all Lords and worlds. Surrounded by gods in the shape of monkeys to serve Him, He the resplendent One has killed you with all your followers for the good of all creatures."

"Once you had mastered the senses and kept them under your control. Then all the three worlds were subject to your sway. The senses, waiting for an opportunity for revenge have now ruined you. You paid no heed to my repeated entreaties not to make an enemy of Rama. Now you see the result of it. You cannot now blame me, for I had warned you and you knew everything. Lord of *rakshasas!* Wherefore this infatuation for Sita! Your riches have gone; friends, relatives, sons and subjects have been wiped out; even you are now lying dead. What good did you achieve? Sita is greater than Arundhati in chastity; greater is her devotion to her husband than that of Rohini. She is like a mother to you; was it then becoming of you to have yielded to your wicked will and attempted to force her. You may ask "Why did she not kill me if she were such a chaste women?" The answer is that she is mother of Mother Earth in patience; she is the wealth of Mahalakshmi, the Goddess of Plenty; her love for her husband has no bounds; she was not born out of the womb; and her charm and beauty are faultless and perfect. She was living in the friendless forest infested with wild beasts. You assumed the garb of an ascetic and with the aid of Maricha, drew by deceit Rama and Lakshmana away from her, and you carried away by force while she was trembling with fear. You did forget me, your own wife, equally beautiful, intelligent and perfect in every respect. The reason for this was not my imperfection but your own clouded mind. Using force against that purest of women, you brought on yourself your own ruin. All this has happened because of my misfortune. If you were not destroyed at the very moment of laying hands on her, my lord, it was because even Agni could not touch you."

"There is no doubt that the evil-doer reaps the fruits when the time is ripe. He who does good gains happiness, he who does evil misery. Vibhishana always trod the path of the righteous, sought refuge with Raghava, the embodiment of *dharma;* he therefore secured happiness, longevity, and the kingdom of Lanka. You were evil-minded, gave up *dharma,* and pursued *adharma;* evil deeds were your achievements, and you wronged Rama deeply. Friendless and kinless, your kingdom lost and killed in battle you lie on the field, covered with dust. Crows, jackals and vultures will feed on your body."

"Many women, far lovelier than Sita, are awaiting your favour sure. But you were caught in the coils of love and you in your folly could not understand it. Neither by birth, nor by charm, neither by accomplishment nor by skill is Sita my equal; but you could not see it because of your senseless passion. Death comes to all through something or other. In your case, Sita was the messenger of death when you brought from afar and with great difficulty. For ten months Sita was kept well-protected even as a child in the womb, and the issue that came out was your death. Thus far has Sita suffered by separation from her lord, henceforth her trials are over and in the company of her lord once again she will be happy. I have enjoyed all the rarest pleasures of life. But now, losing my sons and widowed by your death, I am plunged in the ocean of sorrow."

"With unparalleled riches, adorned with rare ornaments, clothes and perfumed with the finest scents, I have sported with you on the hill tops of Kailasa, Mandara, and Meru and in the woods of Nandana. I have traversed many countries and beheld their wonders with you in the Pushpaka car. Having lost you, I have lost all that pleasure and happiness. I am left wondering at the difference between what I was then and what I am now. How inconstant is the fortune of kings! Who could trust it?"

"Ah! King of kings! How beautiful was your face when you played with me in the drinking halls. Your face, with brows bent as the bow of Manmatha, with its high nose, with the red lips resembling the moon in charms, the sun in its splendour, the lotus in beauty, with the eyes sparkling in intoxication, adorned with a variety of sweet-smelling and beautiful garlands of flowers, breathed in enchanting smiles and speaking sweet words — that face now stands before me; alas! with its beauty bespoiled with Rama's arrows; smeared with clotted blood and flesh and laden, with dust, its brightness is no more. My Lord! What shall I do? Your death has left me a helpless woman. I never thought that I would be such an unlucky wretch".

"You may say "This today is like a bubble in water, a flash of lightning". "Alas! I am the daughter of Maya, the king of the *danavas;* I was wedded to the mighty Lord of the *rakshasas;* my son, Indrajit, was the conqueror and captor of Indra, the king of gods. In what am I wanting? Who is equal to me, can troubles and difficulties assail me?" I was filled with the pride of such thoughts. I was sure that my protectors — invincible father, husband and son could subdue the most powerful enemies with their strength and valour. With such protectors, I did not fear, that misery and sorrow would ever overcome me. How then did this peril from men approach us at all?

"Your body bedecked with brilliant jewels and garlands, shining like the lofty *Indranila* hill, pleasing in sport and overwhelming in its power on the field of battle, used to delight my eyes like rain-bearing clouds pierced by lightning. That same body now lies cleft by sharp arrows; like the quills of the porcupine, the arrows of Rama have covered the vital spots in your body and have torn up the skin and flesh and made a mass of disfigurement. Though I was not fortunate enough to speak with you and hear your words, I thought I could at least embrace you and so I came here. Lo! these cursed arrows of Rama stand between me and my wish and I cannot touch your body. What gruesome sin have I committed that I should see your dead body thus and covered with dust, stretched on the field of battle, torn to pieces, dark with clotted blood like a mountain shattered by the thunderbolt of Indra.

"Can death assail even you! That you would die, even as others do, was to me unreal as a dream. But that dream has now proved true. How did Rama slay you? You are death of Death, a favourite devotee of Paramasiva, the Vanquisher of the lord of Death. All the riches and power in the three worlds were yours to enjoy; the entire universe trembled at your prowess, you conquered the guardians of the quarters. The mount Kailasa, the abode of Sankara, was shaken by your strength; the pride of the proudest was put down by your valour; you were famous through the display of innumerable exploits; you struck terror into every creature. Your voice made all those that heard it quake and cry. You spoke majestic words with courage in the face of your enemies. You were a patron to your kindred friends and dependants. Your prowess in battle was indeed terrible. You killed countless *yakshas, danavas* and *asuras*. Innumerable were the sacrifices that you spoiled. You broke the rules of *dharma*. You carried away forcibly the daughters of the *devas, asuras* and men. You brought sorrow to the womenfolk of your enemies. You were the unquestioned leader of your own people. You practised witchcraft in battle. You were the protector of the island city of Lanka. You were the doer of terrible deeds. Through you we enjoyed the boundless pleasures of love. You were the first jewel among chariot-warriors. Such a lord and husband, now lies dead, slain by Rama. And yet I am alive. Is my body made of stone? Through boons he had obtained protection from all beings except men and he died, killed by the hands of a man. I did no penance and I secured no boons. Even Rama, who killed my lord, could not kill me. Against me his arrows are powerless. You who slept in luxurious bed which others could not even dream of, how you sleep on this bare earth, red with blood and covered with dust, smelling foul with corpses, surrounded by howling dogs and screaming vultures. The arrows that severed the head of my dear son Indrajit, pierced my heart and filled it with grief. Yet I survived, because of the thought that you atleast were left to me. Today, the arrow that destroyed you have brought to me the end of my life. I do not grieve for the death of kith and kin, so long as I had you, but now having lost you, I have lost all other things and must sink for ever in the sea of sorrows.

"You have ascended to the Heaven of heroes, which is difficult for one to reach. Could you not take me with you instead of leaving me here desolate and grief-stricken? Separate from you, how can I live on? How can you, my lord,endure separation from me? While I am wailing and wretched here, could you not speak to me a word of comfort? Or are you angry with me because I have come out of the women's apartments and walked through the city gates exposing myself to public view?

"Even the Sun and Moon dare not set eyes on your women. The wind dare not blow them up. But now these women have cast aside their veils and are here mourning you in the presence of all. Why are you not angry with them? Why do you not console them? These tender women are in an agony of desolation, deprived for ever of the joys they had known in your company. They are all born of high parentage, chaste, devoted to *dharma,* rejoicing in the service of elders, and they have all been widowed. Could it be that today their curses are taking effect — the curses they uttered when you forcibly carried them away after killing their husbands, kith and kin. It is said that tears of chaste women do not fall in vain. Your fate has proved that the saying is true. Your splendour pervades the three worlds. You were famous as a noble warrior. How then could you descend so low as to steal a woman? You ordered Maricha to entice Rama and Lakshmana away from their *asrama* in the guise of a deer and then you carried away Sita. Does not this reveal your cowardice? Never before had I known you troubled by fear in battle. This was itself a sign that your good fortune had left you and that your end was near.

"Well has it been said that when great ones do mean acts evil is sure to befall them. Vibhishana, your brother is a seer of the past, present and future. He is truthful and high souled. When he saw that you had brought Sita, he heaved a sigh of sorrow and said, "Alas! the destruction of our family is come". But consumed by passion, you disregarded his warning and his words have come true. You have brought ruin on the *rakshasa-* race. Was it destined this should be so? I need not grieve for you whose manifold powers has brought you fame. I must grieve only for myself in my separation from you. All your dependents are now left forlorn. Being a woman my mind is distracted and I lament in this manner. You have gone your way followed by your good and evil deeds separated as I am from you. You would not listen to the salutary advice of your friends, well-wishers and brothers. Did not Vibhishana counsel you many times, with sound reasons in accordance with the *sastras,* and with sweet and gentle words? Did you follow his counsel, which would have brought you glory? The advice of Maricha, Kumbhakarna and Maya, my father, also was rejected by you in your pride of your action."

"Looking like the blue rain-cloud, with well-shaped limbs draped in silk, you lie on the bare ground covered with blood sprawling as if you were in deep slumber. Can you not speak a word of comfort to me in my pitiest plight! Are you not born of the family of Mali, Sumali and Malyavan, soliders of great valour and skill, who never turned their back in battle? Could you not raise your eyes and look at me? Arise, Arise. You have lain too long. Never before have you been thus disgraced. The sun, who used to be afraid of you shines without fear on Lanka. With your *parigha,* mighty as the *vajra* of Indra, you had slain countless foes. It shone like the sun; it was adorned with chains of gold; it was highly honoured by you. And behold, here it lies shattered to pieces by the arrows of Rama. Is this battle-field your lady-love that you should embrace it and as for me, you seem to hate me and will not speak to me. Having lost you and suffering such pain and grief why does not wretched heart break into a thousand pieces."

Thus did Mandodari lament, with tears, streaming from her eyes and her heart longing for her husband. Atlast she fell into a swoon. She shone like a lightning flash in the rain-cloud of the evening sky, as she lay there on the breast of Ravana, exhausted by her sorrow. The other wives of Ravana lifted her up, and consoled her saying, "Lady! Childhood, boyhood, youth and old age are all transitory. The fortunes of kings are unstable. You know all this". Hearing these words, she sobbed and cried aloud while tears bathed her body.

Then Rama said to Vibhishana, "Perform the last rites for your brother and send these women back to Lanka". Vibhishana, reflected for a while on all that had gone before and resolved to abide by Rama's well-considered and final decision. However he pleaded with Rama : "Lord! He discarded the path of *dharma*. He was cruel, merciless and false. He carried away the wives of others. My mind does not consent to my performing his last rites. He did nothing but evil to all creatures. Though the world thought him to be my brother, he was in fact my enemy. He was entitled to honour from me only as an elder. It is not proper for me to honour him who by his evil deeds struck terror into all the worlds. The world will be unnatural if I refuse to perform his obsequies, but when they think of his crimes, they will approve of my conduct.

When Rama the foremost of the masters of *dharma* heard the wise Vibhishana speaking thus frankly the thoughts of his mind, he understood Vibhishana's real meaning and being greatly pleased said, "This victory I owe to you. I am therefore bound to do whatever you wish. I should tell you what is best for you." It is also my wish that you should perform the obsequies of Ravana. It is also good for you. Lord of the *rakshasas!* Ravana was born of the *rakahasa*-race. He pursued unrighteousness. He swerved from truth. Even so, powerful and glorious he never retreated in battle. Indra and the *devas* were vanquished by him many times, so have I heard. He was indeed a great soul and endowed with limitless courage. The whole world shook in terror before him. You may ask 'Though he was endowed with all these qualities, still he was my foe'. How can I perform his funeral rites? But I say, 'Death should put an end to all enmity and anger". Let not these bitter feelings survive his death. Perform his obsequies. He is as much my kinsman as yours. You know well the mysteries of *dharma*. Do for him the rites prescribed. And you will gain matchless fame as one, who performed without rancour the obsequies of his wicked enemy.

Listening to Rama's words, Vibhishana sent back the ladies to Lanka and commenced quickly the rites due to one who had performed many sacrifices. The priests piled up sandalwood logs and sprinkled on them fragrant scents. As laid down in the *Vedas,* they spread on it skin of the 'Ranku' deer. The ceremonies such as *Pitrumedha-samskara* were duly gone through. The fire-place was set up in the south-east. The fires were lit in the west, east and south; ghee and curds from the sacrificial vessels were sprinkled on the funeral pyre. A cart for bringing the Soma king was placed at the foot; a mortar to hull paddy used in sacrifices was placed between the thighs; the other wooden vessels were placed in their respective positions as detailed in the *Sastras.* Very near the pyre a clean goat was sacrificed. The Fire-god was invoked and twigs dipped in ghee were placed on the four sides. (This is the *'Paristaranikam'* according to Govindaraja; but Tirtha has it as *"Anustaranikam"* — According to this a beautiful and perfect cow is killed and its skin smeared with ghee is spread over the body). The body of Ravana was adorned with precious scents, garlands and clothes with tears in their eyes. Vibhishana and other *rakshasas* scattered fried grain over the pyre. Chanting Vedic Mantras, Vibhishana set fire to it. Then he bathed and with water dripping from his clothes, he offered sesamum and *durva* grass with water and then water alone for the dead. After bowing low before the pyre, he consoled the ladies again and sent them back to Lanka. When the ladies had entered the city, Vibhishana came back to Rama and stood before him with reverence. Rama was happy in the company of Sugriva, Lakshmana and the army of monkeys, having destroyed his enemies, even as Indra had destroyed Vritra.

CHAPTER 115

THE INSTALLATION OF VIBHISHANA

THE *devas, gandharvas* and *danavas,* having witnessed the death of Ravana, their inveterate foe, ascended their cars and proceeded to their abodes speaking joyously on the way of the ghastly death of Ravana, the prowess of Rama, the wonderful battle waged by the *vanaras,* the sane counsel of Sugriva, the valour of Lakshmana, the son of Sumitra, and the love that bound the two brothers together. Rama sent back the effulgent car of Indra and bade farewell to Matali with affection. The charioteer of Indra took leave of Rama and sped to his heavenly abode. Then Raghava affectionately embraced by Sugriva and welcomed by *vanara*-chiefs, reminded by Lakshmana, proceeded to the place where the army had encamped.

Turning to Lakshmana standing by his side, resplendent with glory and valour, Rama said to him, "Child! Our Vibhishana loves and reveres me; he has given us immense help; take him to Lanka and install him on the throne with due ceremony. I have long been looking forward to this coronation of Vibhishana as the ruler of Lanka ("He loves me", denotes the duty of a friend; "he reverences me" shows the act of a devotee; "he rendered immense help", indicates the death of Ravana as the main purpose; "the looking forward" is the result of the Lord's wish to kill Ravana and reward Vibhishana, who sought refuge with him).

"I shall carry out your orders", said Lakshmana overjoyed and directed the monkeys whose speed was like that of thought, to fetch holy waters from the seas in gold pitchers. Straightaway the monkey-heroes brought holy water from the four oceans. Then installing Vibhishana on a high seat, Lakshmana gave him ritual bath with water from a pitcher. The monkey-chiefs poured holy water from the other pitchers on Vibhishana. Thus, according to the behest of Rama, Lakshmana crowned Vibhishana, of pure mind, as the lord and ruler of Lanka in the manner prescribed by the *Vedas,* while all the monkey and *rakshasa*-hosts looked on with joy Lakshmana with Vibhishana and others entered the city only after Rama gave the order. Vibhishana was 'pure-minded'; and he accepted the kingdom of Lanka only because he would not disobey the wish of the Lord. Service to his Lord was the aim of his life. The ministers of Vibhishana and his *rakshasa*-friends greatly rejoiced at his coronation. Having accepted the kingdom from Rama, arranged the welfare of his subjects and consoled the families who had lost their kith and kin in the battle, returned to where Rama was. Then the citizens presented Vibhishana auspicious grains, sweets and flowers as a token of their love and devotion to him. Vibhishana in turn placed all these auspicious gifts at the feet of Rama and Lakshmana. Seeing that the object of Vibhishana was achieved and that he was feeling mightily pleased, Rama accepted the presents just to satisfy Vibhishana.

Then Rama turned to Hanuman, who was standing mountain-like with folded palms and said "Oh Son of Vayu", Take permission from Vibhishana and proceed to the City of Lanka. With his consent, enter the women's apartment and find out Sita. Give her the joyous news of our victory. Tell her that we are all well, myself, Lakshmana and Sugriva. Tell her also that I have killed Ravana. Bring back to me her reply on hearing these happy tidings".

CHAPTER 116

DISCUSSION BETWEEN SITA AND ANJANEYA

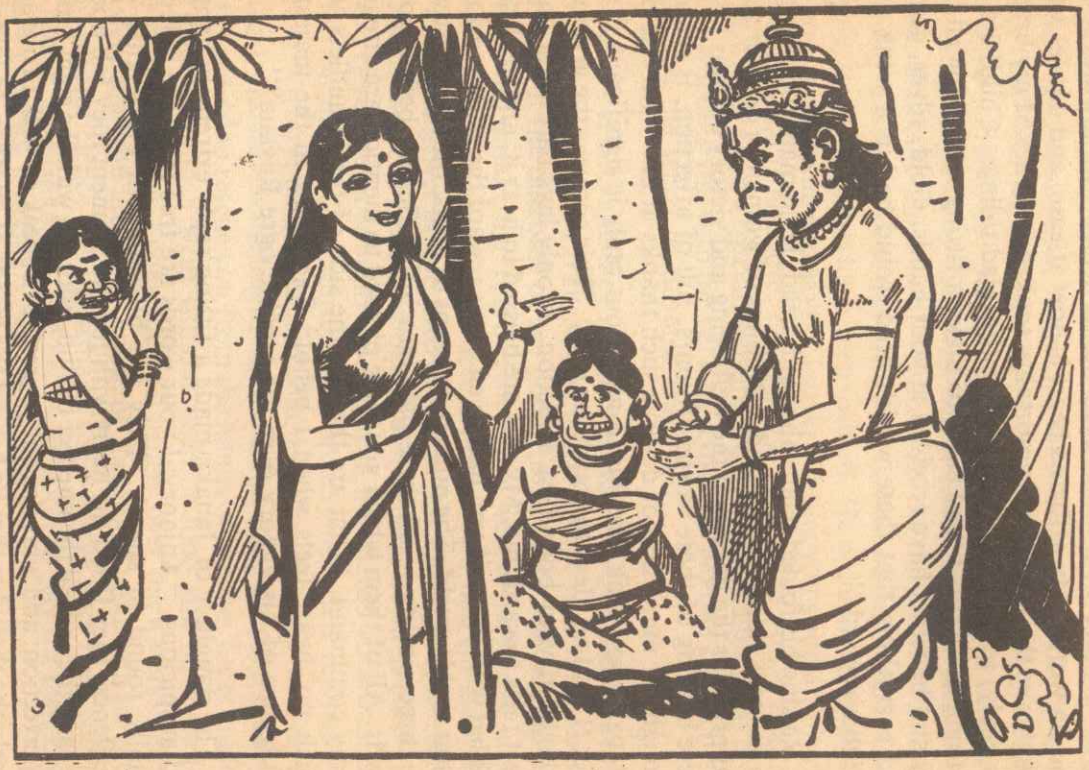
SO ordered by Rama, the *rakshasas* guided the steps of Maruti into Lanka. He came upon the lady Sita in the women's apartments of Ravana. She was covered with dust all over; it was long since she had a bath. She sat in the *asoka* grove under a tree, listless and despairing, in the midst of dreadful *rakshasis* like unto Rohini in the grip of the planet, Mercury. He drew near, announced himself, saluted her with reverence and stood before her with his body, speech and mind stilled. He folded his palms and then covered his mouth with his hand as a mark of obedience. She beheld him there, the mighty son of Anjana; surprised thereat, she sat silent and still, and knew not what to think or do. Then she looked at him more carefully. His light and happy looks made her happy too. Maruti noted her face, blossoming with joy at his presence there. He proceeded to give her in detail the message of Rama. "Lady! Raghuvira, Lakshmana, Sugriva, Vibhishana and all the monkey-hosts fare well. Ravana, the worst foe we had, is now no more. We have achieved our purpose here. They asked me to convey to you the good news of their well-being. Rama laid Ravana low in battle, thanks to the help of Vibhishana, the tireless efforts of the monkey-hosts, the keen dexterity of Lakshmana, Sri Rama is now happy, since his wishes have been realised. He ordered me to inquire of your well- being and says : 'Janaki! I bring you good and joyful news. Ravana is no more, he who was so cruel to you. I shall do what will give you a special pleasure. You have been long away from me. I will take you with me back to Ayodhya. No one knows better than you the secret of devoted wifehood.

All my efforts and they were not slight — to overcome Ravana, would have borne no fruit, if you had not kept your hold on life. So it is but the outcome of my good fortune that you managed to live on with unfaltering trust and love. You were in the grip of untold misery and fear all these terrible months. You had no assurance of my coming over here to take you back. Ravana begged, entreated, derided, flattered you and spoke ill of me. Nay, he threatened your life. Yet you never submitted to his will, but placed your trust and affection in me. Care, misery and anxiety have left me never to return. Victory, unclouded and complete, has crowned me. Ravana is dead; and he was the last of our foes. This Lanka is ours to dispose off. I vowed to rescue you from the hands of the foe. I was anxious to make it good. I went without sleep or food and have realised my purpose today. I constructed a bridge over the waters. Feel no anxiety that you are in the house of Ravana. Lanka and its riches and magnificience are Vibhishana's. So grieve not! Feel yourself at home. Vibhishana will be here very soon to pay his respects to you. And this is Rama's message to you."

So spake Maruti. And Sita, with her face like the full moon in her joy, rose in haste and stood there mute, not knowing what to do. And Maruti noting it replied, "Lady! why do you not speak to me? What occupies your thoughts?" Sita, the jewel of chaste and loyal womanhood, was immensely pleased. "Your words shook me with joy!" she said, "The news of the victory of my lord swept me off my feet for a while. I was beside myself with joy and could find no words. My afflicted heart is now at ease, and dances with delight, as the waters of immortality soaked it. I racked my brains for reply, to him who brought me this glad tidings. Child! I find nothing in all this broad earth to make a fitting return for all the joy and benefit I have received at your hands. Gold, silver, gems, and everything that these worlds hold would be but a weak and pitiable reward."

Raising his folded palms above his head, Hanuman stood before her in meek humility and said, "Noblest of women! You ever seek and pray for the good and the well-being and victory of your lord! Mere hearing of these words of yours, full of affection, is reward enough for me; I do not deserve such thanks at all. Who else but you can ever speak like this to me? Your reply is significant. You said, 'I find no ideas to couch the reply. 'This conveys the gracious thought of your boundless affection. It only lays bare what your heart feels towards me. My ears are blessed to hear it; and my heart is filled with joy as if you had given me as reward the most precious things in this world. The numerous heaps of gems, the lordship over the three worlds — all these pale into insignificance before your words. All of them which you were pleased to mention are already at my command. What are they by the side of the boundless joy which my heart feels when I behold Raghuvira in the majestic effulgence of his victory over the terrible ogre Ravana?"

The daughter of Janaka made a fitting reply extremely happy and auspicious. "Anjaneya! your words are free from the defects usually found in speech. They are blessed with every kind of excellence; they flood the heart with joy the moment they fall upon the ears; they reveal the intellect behind, adorned with the eight kinds of perfection; and who else but yourself can speak so well. (To grasp clearly the thoughts that lie behind the words of another, to imprint them on the tablets of our memory, to recall them when there is need, to speak them to others in appropriate articulation, to divine the thoughts of another, to give a quick reply, to prove the inner sense of words and to grasp the real nature and qualities of objects



these eight are the marks of such intellect). In addition to your matchless excellence as a speaker, you stand high in the glory of your mental and moral equipment. The daring son of Lord Vayu! you are ahead of him in the matter of enlivening all beings and gladdening their hearts. You are the fountain-source of that grand law of life that enfold all creation with its matchless compassion and mercy. Indefatigable exertion, perennial joy, and delight in the battle-field, the wisdom of the ages, strength of body, valour, skill, power to overcome, patience and tolerance, forgiveness towards those that offend us, mighty effort, unshaken courage, noble modesty and many other excellent qualities, cluster round you and glory in your lustre. Do not harbour the thought that I flatter you with fancied excellences."

Hanuman was not in the least elated by these words. On the other hand, he stood before lady Sita with his folded palms on his head in reverence and said, "Mother! these *rakshasis* here are dreadful to look at, cruel by nature, fierce in looks and merciless in acts; their words make our hearts quake with terror. Now, your lord is your god; you have been cruelly torn away from his arms; Ravana has imprisoned you here, in this *Asoka* grove; and unspeakable misery has been your lot. Then these creatures reviled you, scolded you, frightened you, put you to shame, pained your ears with unseemly words, rushed at you as if to kill you – and I was an impotent witness to all of it all. No one else but I has a right to be enraged at these devils, no one had a chance to witness it Rama, Lakshmana, Vibhishana, Sugriva and the other monkey-lords. So my heart hankers at dealing death unto all of them; and it is an utterly uncontrollable, consuming desire. I pray you give me leave. This is the boon I seek of you. This shall be the reward to bestow on me. I would beat them till my hands ache. I would pound them with my knees. I would tear them to pieces; I would crush their ears and noses, pull out their hair by the roots, tear them to ribbons with my claws, smash their cheeks and jaws, jump down upon them from a great height, smash them on the ground and kill them with my fists. Are these not the demons that were guilty of boundless cruelty and torture beyond description? So I wish to put them to death with countless means of torture. This is absolutely necessary; have these not been guilty of heinous offence?"

Patience, mercy and other noble qualities were the cause of the peerless fame of Sita, the World Mother. She gave a reply worthy of the highest *dharma;* "Bravest of the monkey-race! these are the servants of the king; hence dependent; bound to obey his slightest commands; liable to cruel punishment if they disobey. Should one feel offended by the acts of these slaves of Ravana? Why waste your breath upon these? I must have wrought evil in some past birth and have reaped the result in this birth in the shape of these miseries. I reap what I sowed; why blame them? It was destined that I should suffer thus and these are but the instruments. I have thought all this before, reached this conclusion and reconciled myself to it. I was powerless then to prevent this suffering. I cannot bear to see others suffer; and how can I see these suffer. Compassion held my hands back then; it does so even now. Were I minded to kill them, could I not have consumed them to ashes then and there? Do I need your help for this? If these *rakshasis* treated me cruelly, it was by the orders of Ravana. Now that he is dead, it is far from their thoughts to trouble me now. Even if these were independent and offended me of their own accord, it is upto us to bear with them.

Once upon a time, a hunter was hotly chased by a tiger (very closely) and he saved himself by climbing up a lofty tree that stood welcomingly near. But lo; there was a huge grizzly bear sitting on its branches; the man, in utter despair, threw himself on the mercy of the hairy monster and cried, "I place my life in your hands. Do with me as you will." 'Fear not' replied the bear "The tiger shall not come at you". Later on, the hunter was overcome with sleep and the bear allowed him to rest his head on its lap. Then, the tiger called out to the bear and said, "Friend, we are of the same kind; we live in the forest. We have our joys and sorrows in common. But, this is a man, a hunter by profession and our sworn enemy; he makes his living by killing us; he is not of our kith nor kin; we have nothing in common with him. The moment he is safe from my clutches, he will forget everything that he owes you and will return your kindness by seeking to kill you. Throw him down to me. We will share him.

Then, the bear, out of the generosity of his nature, sternly replied, "Enough of this. What treachery and baseness? He who seeks me out and craves my protection is my honoured guest. If I should place myself on a level with you and traitorously hand him over to your tender mercies, the finger of scorn would be ever pointed at me as a monster of wickedness, as a wretch that betrayed him that sought shelter with me. Nay, the Holy books say that an eternity of nameless woe in the deepest and the darkest hells is the portion of such ingrates. Soil my ears no more with such foulness."

Soon after, the hunter awoke, and the bear, feeling tired and sleepy, laid his head on his lap and fell into a profound slumber. Then, the tiger called out to him and said, "Fool! you sought to escape me, didn't you? A nice person have you pitched upon to protect you. May be you belong to the same species; may be you live together; may be he is your dear friend. Idiot that you are! Know you not that he is a deadlier enemy to you than myself. You have played into his hands nicely and placed your head between his jaws. He only waits for me to leave this place to crush your poor bones to powder. Now, be wise and take heed in time. Throw him down to me while he is heavy with sleep. It matters very little to me whether you or he goes to relieve my pangs of hunger. Look sharp and neither of us will be worse for it".

Alas! Man, frail man, listened to the words of the tempter and fell. Distrust of the noble bear grew upon him apace and without a pang of regret he threw him down to the tiger. But beneficient providence slept not; the bear awoke as it fell and by an instinctive moment, caught at a branch and swung himself upto his seat. Then horrible fear came over the traitor and he gave himself up for lost. But, the noble beast read his heart like an open book and said to him with a smile, "Good man! Fear not. Far be it from me to ever seek to remember what you might have been inweighed to do; and far be it from me to seek to go back upon my plighted word".

At once, the wily tiger turned the situation to his advantage and cried out, "Friend Bruin! See you not that I was a true prophet? Now, it needs no ghost to tell you that your protege is a demon of ingratitude, If you have not taken leave of your senses, you will at once throw him down to me."

And to him spake back the bear, "It is in the nature of things for fire to scorch, for water to drown, for scorpions to sting, for cobras to kill. A wicked heart ever asserts itself but no one who walks the path of righteousness ever dreams of taking offence at it. He would not place himself on the same level by seeking to pay back ingratitude with injury. To me my life is as naught, when placed against my plighted word. Truth is the brightest jewel that ever shines on the head of the righteous." He closed his ears to every argument that the tiger used to drag him away from his purpose and watched over the safety of the hunter that livelong night until the tiger slunk away from the spot in sheer despair.

Now, Anjaneya! you would be the last to advise me how to behave less nobly than the beast. He who does us good is entitled to our love, to our gratitude, even to the fullest, is it not? But, equally so, if not more, is he who seeks to harm us. It is no great boast that we return good for good; but to return good for evil is something worth doing.

Now, take this view of the case, if every being in the universe were to sin and go against the good law, then, sin is no name for it. Now, can you point out to me any one who has not sinned? If so, he is welcome to judge the others and punish them. Let him that is pure, let him that is perfect, sit in judgment over the guilty. It is my honest conviction that the wide world holds none such. All have broken the sweet harmony of nature or will; all deserve to be judged and punished; and then, it is no crime and it is no punishment. Hence, I say unto you "THERE IS NO EVIL IN THE WORLD; THERE IS NO EVIL-DOER, NAY, NOT ONE."

My Lord and Master, whom all hold as the Ideal Man, the Soul of Perfection, is the first offender and the worst — even he to whose service you have dedicated yourself. The meanest and the most insignificant creature on earth seeks to protect with his life, if necessary, its mate, who looks upto it for help, for guidance and for safety. It defends her life, her honour and her happiness with its last breath. Behold! Sri Rama is a man, the crown of creation; nay, more, he is a brave warrior, and the descendant of a long line of heroes; the blood of the Ikshvakus runs in his veins. And here, he has chosen to swallow an insult, even the deadliest, put up on him by a *rakshasa*. He calls me his wife; he took my hand into his before the bright God of Fire, swore for all time to love, to cherish and to protect me; I am, as he says, dearer to him than life; I put my trust in his manhood, in his might, in his nobility and followed him to the trackless wilds; and there came vile *rakshasa,* a monster of iniquity, laid violent hands upon me, and bore me away to his island-lair. Hours, days, weeks, months have gone by; and still my lord comes not; his patience or cowardice is something unspeakable. Is it human? Is it manly? Is it warrior-like? Is it kingly? Was I wrong in saying that he is the first and the worst of offenders? Go, mete out just punishment to him first and foremost.

You come next. Sugriva's servant and messenger you are; his word is or should be a law unto you; it is not for you to transgress it nor to exceed it. He who does not do what his master bids him is as much guilty as he who does what his master bids him not. Now, verily speaking, were your master's commands to seek me out and take back the news to him? Or, were you given orders to go further to destroy this *asoka* grove, to slay the warriors of Ravana, and set fire to his capital? You are a traitor unto your master. You are a criminal of no mean order, Go, mete out justice and punishment to yourself before you speak of others.

Last, but not the least, I who discourse so wisely to you, am a great offender. The daughter of a race of warriors, spouse of the greatest hero of all time, I live in the breath of my fair name and chastity; I should know no other god but my husband; and never, even in my wildest dreams, should the shadow of another man darken my heart. I should have put away this frail body the moment that the sin-soiled hands of the *rakshasa* polluted it by touch. That is or should have been my *dharma*. But I turned my face away from it; two five-month periods have gone by; and yet you see me clinging to this hated life like the most abandoned woman. Go mete out justice due and stern punishment to me, ere proceed further.

Now, sit in honest judgment over Sri Rama, yourself and me. Time enough to think of how you should deal with the poor *rakshasis.*"

(In the discussion over the acceptance of Vibhishana's surrender, Rama related the story of the dove to Sugriva; Sita here relates to Hanuman the story of the bear to point a moral. This sloka is famous as Sita's declaration of Faith in the doctrine of refuge). "Whether these *rakshasis* are guilty as you think, whether they are innocent as I think, why should I apply my mind to it. If they are guilty much the better. A dirty man has the pressing need of a bath. These came to us only because they are sinners. Good men and virtuous have no need of us. Their very merit saves them. So, my hope is that these are sinners. You may say, 'One should not punish those that deserve it not; and one should deal condign punishment to those that deserve it. Now, this duty of justice is not honoured in practice by you. 'Do you know that if a sinner seeks refuge of us, he deserves our help most? This is a special application of the law, but it appeals not to you; a special application overcomes the ordinary one. It matters not even if these seek our death; they certainly deserve our protection. Men of large heart and pure soul offer it. You are merely a monkey; you are of the lineage that leaps from tree to tree; you ilk-race desire only what it has aspired many times before; so I am not in the least surprised at this thought of yours. Let us dismiss the question of weighing the merits and demerits of these poor creatures. It is not a safe procedure. Looking at the misery and terror they are confronted with, it will melt the heart of adamant.

"The *rakshasas* take shapes and forms at will, cruelty is the badge of their race; torturing others is supreme delight to them; so, it is no wonder that they commit sins. Yet, one should do them no harm."

Hanuman with his penetrating intellect, avidly grasped the principle that lay behind her words. She was the mother of the Universe, famed for her unbounded mercy. She was the fitting mate of the Supreme Lord. So he said, "Mother, you are no other than the honoured help-mate of Raghunatha; the principle of giving refuge which he relentlessly practises is rendered doubly glorious by your good self. All the fame that crowns him comes through you, does it not? You are the fit companion of his. So permit me to leave; and send a reply to Raghava through me. I shall go back to him."

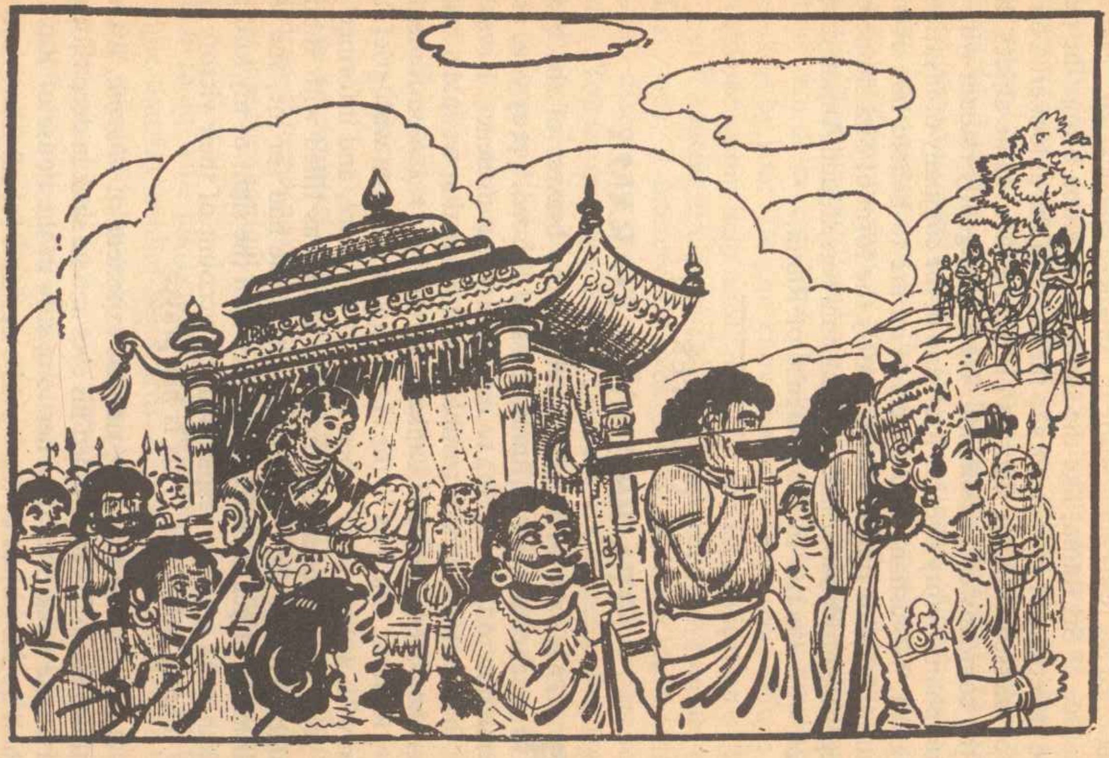
And to him said Janaki "Best of the monkey-race! I yearn to see and pay my obeisance to my lord and husband". Those words magnified the resplendent lustre of Anjaneya and he cried, "Mother! the face of Sri Rama, like the shining full moon brings the peace and sweetness of immortality to the heart of the onlooker. You are to be blessed with the sight of his divine face, as he abides there in the company of Lakshmana. He is effulgently radiant with the triumphant victory over his foes, and in the company of his friends, Sugriva, Vibhishana and others. You are to behold him even as Indrani beholds Indra". Immediately the form of Sita shone with magnificent splendour like Mahalakshmi herself; and Anjaneya sped back with alacrity to the presence of Rama.

CHAPTER 117

SITA BROUGHT TO RAMA

ANJANEYA of mighty intellect, the bravest of the brave, touched the feet of Rama and said, "Lord! I pray you, grant permission to the lady Sita to come unto your presence. It was for her that we took all this trouble; it is for her that we laid a bridge over the waters, besieged Lanka, destroyed the *rakshasa*-forces and slew Ravana. She was in the *Asoka* grove, broken with grief, and dim with welling tears, when I found her there, and informed her of your victory over Ravana. Her heart was filled with sublime delight. Out of the trust and affection she had for me, she said, 'Anjaneya, I yearn to feast my eyes with the sight of my lord and Lakshmana who are resplendent on account of their victory over the mighty *rakshasas*. This is her prayer."

Rama, the best and the noblest exponent of *dharma,* listened to these words. Tears blinded his eyes and he sank in deep thought. "If I take back Sita after her long stay in the house of Ravana, I shall be the object of the world's derision for all time. And if I should put away Janaki, innocent and pure, the blackest sin will be mine. How to get over this dilemma? I have to wound again the bleeding heart of Sita, who has already suffered untold misery". He sighed hot and deep, and fixed his looks on the earth. Then



he turned to Vibhishana who was all eagerness to lead the lady Sita to Rama and said, "Bring Sita here quickly. Let her have an auspicious bath and wear all her decorations. (It would be unjust and cruel to pierce her heart with merciless words in the forlorn wretchedness she was in. Hence his directions. Again, Rama was not going to put her away. He was intent that her immaculate purity and noble loyalty should be vindicated to the world thro' Brahma and other gods. It was but meet that she should be brought there with all honours. Should he accept her back as she was, the evil-minded world would cast doubts on her innocence and say, 'Lo! Look at this impropriety. Lady Sita is endowed with peerless beauty. Ravana heheld her in her splendour; he lost his heart to her and carried her away by force to his palace. Ten months has she stayed with him, the terror of the worlds. And would he have been quiescent and left her in peace?' I have come down into the mortal world to establish law and order. Others would take a leaf out of my book and I, the lord of men, know fully well that she is utterly pure and spotless. But to clear her before the world and ward off suspicion and calumny, I shall speak to her harshly; make her pass through the ordeal of fire; get Brahma and the other *devas* to proclaim her greatness; and also to declare and glorify before the world my Supreme Divinity then. And take back Sita to myself in answer to their prayers". This was the idea in the mind of Rama).

Thus Vibhishana ran hot-foot to the ladies' apartments and sent respectful word through his women to Sita : "Mother I entreat you to take an auspicious bath and cover yourself with matchless perfumes and ornaments. There is a meet conveyance for you. Your lord desires to see you." And to him replied Sita, "Child! nay, not so. It is good that I stand in his presence even as I am". But Vibhishana said, "May I submit that it is good and proper that you do as your lord and king wishes?" Then the lady Sita to whom her husband was her god and devotion to him was a vow, said "Let it be even so".

Then Sita took an auspicious bath; the *rakshasa*-girls decorated her with priceless ornaments and garments; she was borne on a palanquin blazing like the noon-day sun; it was adorned with fine hangings; *rakshasa*-warriors guarded her on all sides armed to the teeth; and thus she was led to the presence of Rama. Rama knew she was there. Yet he was plunged in deep thought. Vibhishana drew near and said, "Lord! as ordered by you I have led the lady Sita here". Raghunandana was filled with happiness at these words. "After all these efforts, I have slain Ravana and it has been given to me to see Sita again." But his face grew anxious at the thought : "She was in the palace of Ravana all this time. I know not how the world will view it." So he mustered up anger in order to speak harsh words to her. Then he planned his future procedure; he made it appear that he was sad; and said unto Vibhishana standing by, "Lord of the *rakshasa,* my dear boy, your heart ever prays for my victory and well-being. Let Vaidehi come soon. Then Vibhishana pushed back the crowds that pressed forward. The palace-guards used their canes freely on the *rakshasas,* bears and monkeys to keep them at a distance. Then there arose a loud uproar like a storm in the sea.

Thereat, Sri Rama whose natural affection toward his monkey-friends could not bear the sight, stayed them brusquely and turned to Vibhishana, the wise one, with looks that shot baleful fires, and cried, "Thou, *rakshasa!* you clean forgot that you are in my presence. You dare to lay brutal hands on these. Enough, enough; stop. Whom did you take these for? They are mine, they are dear to me as my life itself. Do you think that ladies are best guarded and protected by houses, garments, curtains, courts, and driving back of crowds and such like royal honours and attentions? Lo! their impeccable conduct is their best armour. Stone walls are no protection; it is the pure and spotless heart that keeps one away from danger in times of unusual trouble. When those dear to us go away from this world when danger hangs over the kingdom on the battle-field, in the *svayamvara* hall, on the holy sacrificial ground and during the marriage ceremony, all the sundry can look at women and it is no stain to them. This lady has now come on the battle-field; unusual trouble is drawing night unto her. Moreover, she is by my side. There is no harm in her being seen by all. So lead her here and be quick at it. Let her behold me in the midst of my friends who have joyfully given up their lives for me. All these have passed through untold danger and difficulty. They have come here leaving their house and home behind them. They have suffered much at the hands of these cruel *rakshasas* and all this to what purpose? To put away trouble and sorrow from this lady and keep her from death, is it not? And so, these with me stand to her in the place of a father. What harm is there in a father seeing his child?" Vibhishana shook with fear at these words and he proceeded to lead Sita near Rama most reverently. Lakshmana and Anjaneya listened to the words of Raghava and said themselves with deep sorrow, "Verily this is unexpected, unthought of, a bolt from the blue. We have seen with our own eyes the grief of Raghava at having been torn from the side of Sita. He was about to annihilate countless worlds for her sake and now his words are strange indeed. They indicate his aversion to her as if he cared not for her in the least".

Then Sita was overpowered with shame and shrunk within herself; "Alas! after all these months, after all these dangers and troubles, I was blessed enough to behold my lord and husband; I had hardly beheld him when lo! at the very outset these words winged with wrath fall upon me like the thunderbolt". She felt aghast to appear before other men. So she hid her face with the aid of her garment and slowly drew near Rama and could only say, choked with emotions, "Aryaputra, my lord and husband". Her eyes were blind hot with tears as she gave vent to her grief. She had never till then beheld her husband like this. He stood there crowned with boundless fame, having come out victorious from a dreadful fight. The Goddess of Victory smiled upon him sweetly. His martial radiance illuminated all around. She was filled with boundless wonder and surprise at this unexpected change of attitude. She had despaired of ever being happy; honour and life were a dream of the past; husband, kith and kin and bright fame were things beyond recall. Then there had come over her heart limitless joy, for danger, difficulty and grief were but mist before the rising sun. Her lord and husband was her guard. Her love and devotion were beyond description. Hence, she lifted up her eyes to his face of divine loveliness. Like unto the full moon at her rising, his face was red with wrath. Like unto the spotless radiant moon the next moment (will disturb it). Sita stole a glance upon the face and features of her dear lord from whom she was torn away for long. She forgot all her sufferings and sorrows, all her miseries and troubles.

CHAPTER 118

RAMA IS WROTH WITH SITA

AT the sight of Sita, who cast her eyes on the earth out of coyness as she stood by him, Rama's anger blazed forth, "Lady I have worsted my foes in battle. I reduced to ashes their capital. I have taken ample revenge. I have done everything that a Kshatriya-hero should do to wipe off the blot upon his fair name. You may fondly imagine that all this was to get you back. But it is utterly baseless. My efforts have been crowned with success. Ravana has been punished enough for his offence to me. I have wiped off the face of the earth the insult he hurled upon me; and his breed along with it. I have displayed my valour in the face of the countless worlds. My word has been proved true; and care and anxiety have left from me. Ravana brought you away when you were helpless and he fickle of mind; human effort has healed the injury brought by destiny. The aims of life are not attained by him, who takes lying down, the disgrace put upon him and exerts not his valour and prowess to the utmost. He is an insignificant creature. The wonderful leap of Hanuman over these waters, the destruction of Lanka, and the amazing needs of valour on the battle-field, have borne fruit today; as also the labours of Vibhishana who sought my side in preference to that of his wicked brother". The words of Raghuvira startled her; her eyes looked troubled with fear, like a delicate fawn hemmed in by tigers. The lady Sita wept out her heart in torrent of tears.

Like unto a blazing fire fed with further oblations of ghee, Rama's wrath blazed all the more fiercely. His brows were knit. He brooked not that Sita should stand before him. He looked at her out of the corner of his eyes and pierced her heart with cruel words in the very hearing of the monkeys and the *rakshasas*. I have done utmost everything that one should do to clear himself of the blot laid upon him by another. In the far past, Ilvala, the *asura* made the south inaccessible for all creatures. Then the *Maharshi* Agastya of divine wisdom slew him and rescued the region from his tyranny; even so, I have recovered you from the enemy that carried you away. I crossed safe the ocean of battles, thanks to the valour of my friends. But do not delude yourself with the fond thought that all this was for you. I come of the spotless line of Ikshvaku. Peerless am I in fame; it behoves me to discharge my duty as a Kshatriya; I should wash myself white off the black ill-fame cast upon me. You dwelt in the house of Ravana, the wicked one; hence your life there is open to suspicion. A man with the sore eye cannot stand a bright light and I do not brook your standing before me. It pains me much (The simile is infinitely suggestive; the blame falls upon the diseased eye and not upon the light. The cloud hangs heavy over the heart of Rama and not upon the lady Sita). Do not stand in my presence. I have no use for you. The wide world is open to you. You have my leave to go your way; Know you of any one coming of a lofty line, endowed with matchless valour and fame, nay, calling himself a man, know you of any one who would take back unto himself his wedded wife that stayed for ten long months in the house of another, an impotent victim of his strength and power? Ravana carried you away on his lap. He devoured you with his burning looks of lust. Come of the unsullied line of Ikshvakus, should I take you back now, the meanest creature that crawls on the face of the earth would cry in derision and scorn. Fie! Fie! I recovered you from the enemy only to safeguard the tradition of my line and self-respect and it has brought me high credit. My heart has no place for you, not the least. Do not take it that I am moved by anger to fling these words at you. Go where you will. This is my carefully and calmly considered decision. Our elders have it that a woman should never be left to herself; so you may abide wherever you like with those who are your children — with Lakshmana, Bharata, Satrughna, Sugriva, Vibhishana, and the like. You are endowed with matchless beauty; you steal the hearts of those who behold you; and Ravana bore you away out of his love for you and kept you in his apartments for ten months. You were completely in his power. Is it in the nature of things that he would not have bent you to his will?

By divine providence, it was given to Sita to behold again Raghava, dearer to her than her very life, torn from her arms for ten long months, — he who was to bless her with his presence and love after the dark spell of despair. She fondly looked forward to seeing the end of her grief and misery; for his words, sweet and charming, led her to believe that his love for her was still the same. Like the bolt from the blue, there fell upon her ears these words cruel and deadly that she was fated to hear. The thought forced torrents of tears from her and she was crushed by grief like unto a young plantain trampled by a mad elephant.

CHAPTER 119

SITA PASSES THROUGH FIRE

RAGHUNANDANA expressed himself thus stingingly or mordantly and harshly enough to make the hairs of the heaven bristle up. Sita was plunged in boundless grief. He who spoke thus was her beloved husband bound to protect her in every way; loving and dear to her even as her very life till that moment. He had never spoken to her without a smile and look of intense love; he had spoken harsh word to her. The parents and brothers of Rama treated her even more affectionately than they did her husband. Her father, the ruler of Mithila had brought her up with infinite love and delicacy, having been given to him by providence after long years of barrenness. She never knew even the shadow of another man beside her husband; and here she was brought before millions and millions of monkeys and *rakshasas* gathered on the battle-field. The words of her husband and their ruler pierced her heart and put disgrace upon her, before their very eyes, the cruel words and their crueller suspicion. Shame gripped her heart; her form shrunk within itself; her head was bowed with grief; her heart was broken with that unheard of calumny and she stood there for a while as if demented, while burning tears rushed from her bleary eyes. Then she wiped her eyes and struggled hard with heavy sorrow to express herself briefly and to the point. "Lord! do these words become you? Am I to have my ears pained with them? They are very harsh and spiteful to hear. You have clean forgot your noble lineage, scintillating fame and immaculate character; you have likewise no thought of my lineage, the manner of my coming into this world, my stainless name and fame, and my unsullied life. But you have uttered words that befit more a nameless and homeless vagrant speaking to some nameless and homeless woman. You pass in the world as the prince of heroes. Is this worthy of you? I am not in the least guilty of what you seem to think of. Great soul! I swear by the merit I have earned till now. Believe me, your heart is darkened with suspicion that womankind are one and all of the same type and tarred with the same brush, as some low common woman that you might have come across. Had you known me well and truly you would not have acted thus. You said that Ravana bore me away. True, but remember that I am a woman, a lonely woman, a helpless woman, and he a *rakshasa* of boundless strength, cruel, armed, and attended. What then could I do? My body was in the power of others. What could I do, deprived of freedom? But my heart is mine and it twines itself round your feet, now as then and for ever. We have been brought up together from our childhood. We never knew what it was to be away from each other; and this is quite enough to give you clear insight into my nature. Well, if all this goes for nothing, of what avail is any proof that I can ever bring forward? I have nowhere to go. Sometime ago you sent Hanuman to know where I was and how I fared. The moment you heard that I was in the house of Ravana in Lanka, you could have cast me away. Why did you not do so? Or if Hanuman had ever given me that slightest hint of your intentions, the next moment my life would have left this wretched body before his very eyes. Remember I am the wife of a hero and warrior. Had I done so you and your friends would have been saved all this trouble. Victory in battle or death is not the lot of one side alone. There was no call for the dreadful battle with these *rakshasas* at the peril of your life. Are you not the best and bravest of men? You gave way to anger and like a low and despicable man you spoke to me as if I was an ordinary woman. You brush aside all other considerations. You came into the world, as all others, through a man and woman. Am I such a one? I pass as the daughter of Janaka, but was I ever in a womb? Have you ever heard that I came from the womb of the earth? You have in you a boundless power of reading easily and keenly the life and heart of men. Then what prevented you from reading my life and conduct? You were a mere boy when you clasped my hand in wedlock and I too was a girl. And now you have called into question the promise I made to you then. You have clean forgot my devotion to you, the purity of my life and all that made me

dear to you." Thus did she entreat Raghuvira her hot tears choking her words.

Then she beheld Lakshmana standing by with a wry face, dazed with anxiety and at a loss what to do, and she said "Lakshmana! I know well your boundless affection and devotion to your mother Sumitra. Do you remember her last words to you as we were leaving Ayodhya? "Hold Rama as your very father, Dasaratha". You have made them good, day and night, loyally. Now, it is for you to make good another injunction of your mother. "Hold, the daughter of Janaka as your mother as myself." She said so. Did she not? You will not fail her, nor will you fail me. Now I stand before you in her place. I see no other remedy for my sufferings. I alone should end them. Please build up a pile of logs; set fire to it. My very husband has made me an object of scorn and that most unjustly. I shall have nothing to do with this body even for a second. He has cast suspicion on my conduct. My goodness of heart and life have failed to please him any more. He has put me away in the very presence of these counsellors, monkeys and *rakshasas*. I have nowhere to lay my head except the blazing couch of fire."

Lakshmana, stricken to the heart, glanced at the face of Rama for orders. He was always ready by nature and valiant enough to annihilate those who dreamt of evil to lady Sita. But what could he do when his brother Rama himself tortured her so? Against whom could he direct his anger? Janaki, who was a mother unto him, ordered him to build the pyre, yet he questioned Rama out of the corner of his eyes for his orders. He read the consent by many a sign and hint and hastened to obey Sita. Then Janaki went round Rama reverently and slowly, as he stood there with down-cast look and she drew near the fire blazing aloft, as if in angry protest. He hung his head in utter shame! 'I call upon her to give me a proof, of her innocence without any reason for my suspecting spotless loyalty and devotion!' This thought would come upon him should he lift up his eyes to the face of Sita. Enough that I have been away from her arms so long. If she were alive, I can atleast have the consolation of having a distant view of her. I can atleast have the solace of her being well and happy". He could never bring himself to see her die. That is why he dared not hold up his head. On the other hand, Sita walked slowly. "He may not look at me, yet enough for me to be by his side. Let me have as much of his company as possible by my delay". Or she might have said to herself, "Rama is the soul of compassion and the seeker of the good of all beings. He radiates joy and happiness all round. He is famed as the dispeller of grief and woe. May he be tested on my devotion and firmness. Very soon will he treat me with his accustomed kindness and love. It is a huge mistake to precipitate matters and throw away my life". Or she might have thought, "Lakshmana, Hanuman, and Vibhishana, dear unto Rama, know my heart and life as cleanly as my Lord himself, and they would not put up with this injustice. They will argue him out of his ill-considered decision. Let me wait a while". Mentally she saluted in reverence the gods, the brahmins, and spoke with folded hands. "Lord of fire, you are the eternal witness of the good and evil to all beings. If it is true that my heart never enshrined any other but Rama, even for a second, at anytime or in any place or under any circumstances, guard me in every way. If it is true that Raghava holds me guilty, me that am utterly innocent and loyal, guard me in every way then, thou eternal witness of all the worlds. If it is true that my heart ever seeks in deed, word and thought Raghava, the knower of all *dharma,* and Raghava alone, as sole refuge, then guard me in every way. If it is true that I am known as clean and noble of life to the sun, the moon, the wind, the fire, the day and the night, the twilights, the earth and everything, thereon, guard me in every way, thou witness to all the world." She paced round the fire in reverence, cast away all attachment to her body and entered the fire. All there were struck with terror, and stood dazed, trembling and not knowing what to do. The daughter of King Janaka, lovely and radiant as molten gold, adorned with the choicest ornaments and garments, entered the blazing fire, that pierced the heavens, before the very eyes of all. The three worlds beheld her entering the fire, even as the offering of ghee known as the *vasordhara* in a holy sacrifice. The women screamed and shrieked, Ha, Ha, Alas! It tortured the hearts of all the *devas, gandharvas, danavas, siddhas, sadhyas* and the other hosts of the three worlds to see the lady Janaki cast her life away into the fire while she was born to enjoy everything that the worlds could offer. Verily, it was as if a goddess of the heavenly world was hurled down by a curse to the depths of hell. The *rakshasas* and the monkeys filled the air with excited cries of horror and protest. (Some hold that Sita's sufferings from the time that she met Ravana to this moment were only as a penalty of her harsh and baseless accusation of the ever-devoted Lakshmana. But the real Sita disappeared into the sacrificial fire before Ravana came there. So it was the illusory Sita that passed into the fire to give place to the genuine Sita that came out of it to the side of Rama — this is another view of the question).

CHAPTER 120

RAMA PRAISED BY THE DEVAS

RAMA, could not but listen to the words of one and all there; grief overcame him for a moment and he repented deeply of his imprudent act. Being as it were, *Dharma* incarnate, he was bound to exemplify it in his life and lead others on his path; hence he would not take back Sita as she was. But on the other hand he was the soul of boundless mercy. He had to torture the heart of Sita, a woman, his beloved wife, and without the slightest shadow of a proof. Her heart was broken under the weight of grief, misery and persecution, and to add to it, he had inflicted cruel injury on her. These thoughts overcame him quite and hot tears started swelling in his eyes. Then, Kubera, Yama, Indra, Varuna, Mahadeva, Brahma, the fashioner of the worlds, came in their cars resplendent as the noonday sun to Lanka, where Rama was. Adorned with choice ornaments and garments, they one and all lifted their hands above their heads and addressed themselves to Rama, who stood before them in humble reverence, and with clasped hands, "Lord, you are this Brahma here, the evolver of the countless worlds. You are wisdom embodied; all-knowing; and yet you have chosen to slight and neglect the lady Sita, as if you were ordinary mortal. Could you allow or abet or witness her passing through fire? Higher than the highest, higher than Brahma and others here, why do you keep yourself unknowing of your real self. Of yore, in past *kalpa,* as the Vasu Rithadhama and the lord of all creatures, you were the first fashioner of three worlds (the creator of everything upto the ruler of the Brahmanda, the over-soul of all and everything). You are the eighth among the Rudras, the fifth among the *sadhyas,* you contain in your cosmic form the Asvins as your ears, the sun and the moon as your eyes, and you stood as one, at the beginning and at the end of manifestation. All-knowing, all powerful, over-lord of all, you put a slight upon the lady Sita, the daughter of Janaka, the knower of brahman, and she came into the world without the touch of the father and mother. Of the eight aspects of Rudra (Bhava, Sarva, Isana, Rudra, Pasupati, Ugra, Bhima, and Mahadeva) you are the last. Manas, Anumanta, Prana, Chetayana, Viryavan, Siddhi, Jaya, Maya, Hamsa, Narayana, Prabhavan and Vidhi — among these 12 *sadhyas,* he is Viryavan — *Vayupurana.* The word Asvinika indicates that he is the root cause of the Universe).

The Lord of the countless worlds, the joy and delight of all beings he who impels all to discharge their duties, he heard the regents of the quarters render him ordinary praise. It was not enough. The Lord Brahma, who is adored by one and all, must give expression to his greatness in the world. So thought Sri Rama and to give all there an idea that he was ever at the service of those devoted to him, he said "Gods of the heavenly world! I am born as the son of King Dasaratha: my name is Rama. I am but a man among men (this should be understood to mean — In the highest world Srivaikuntha, I express myself in my eternal state, in the fullness and beauty of the divine form and attributes. Yet, that pleases me not. I prefer to be born as a man among men, and be one of you. Again they have named me Rama. And that name is ever dear to me. Again boundless is my joy at being born into the world as the son of the illustrious king Dasaratha"). Who am I? To whom do I belong? What is my purpose here? Open my eyes to these points. ("Sugriva and others do not know that I am Vishnu come down among men. Reveal unto them my inner self that they may believe me. It is pleasing to be known as the Prince of Ayodhya. All wise as you are speak to these clearly and as you have understood my Supreme self". The Lord ever desires to hide the mystery of his being. He is both to open the eyes of others to behold him as he is. But now that the purpose of his coming down was accomplished, with the death of Ravana, he permitted the unfolding of the mystery). Brahma heard him and he, the best, of the knowers of Supreme Brahman, said to all there "Lord Rama of unfailing valour! hear me speak words of utter truth. You abide in the primal matter (Nara) and the individual souls, and you are named Narayana, the inner ruler thereof. (The *sruti* tells us that "in the beginning there was Narayana and none other, neither Brahma nor Isvara nor this earth and sky". This is a reply to the argument "the evolution of the Universe does not fit in with him who has no desire to fulfil). You evolve, preserve, and involve the entire Universe as it were child's play to you; (Yet, even a child has some object in view; it follows, that even the perfect one has to engage himself in action. Having thus praised the Lord by the extraordinary divine names that pertain to His supreme state, he proceeds to describe the next stage of manifestation as Purushaprakiti — Lakshminarayana). You are ever associated with Lakshmi; the *chakra* or disc is your weapon; you pervade everything; you are the primal manifestation, you are the Boar with a single horn; (that Boar lifted up the great mountains with one of his tusks. Then the Gods exclaimed, "Lord! let this one - horned aspect of yours, continue for ever. From that time Madhava became the one-horned Boar" — *Skandapurana*. "Goddess of earth! Krishna with a thousand arms and in the guise of a Boar, brought you up from the waters of dissolution" — *Sruti).*

You are the destroyer of Madhu, Kaitabha and the other *asuras* of yore as also Sisupala, Dantavakra and the others to come. Your forms are eternal. ("Gargi! This is that which the brahmins speak of as *akshara-Sruti.* The knowers of Brahman hold it as *akshara* and the origin of all beings). You are Brahman. (It grows and causes other things to grow. Hence it is known as *Parabrahman - Sruti). Origin, manifestation, change, growth, decrease* and *disintegration touch it not; hence it is satya;* He is ever present at the beginning, the middle and the end of countless Universes; hence it is *Nitya;* He is *Dharma* that brings everything good and auspicious down to the world. He has his forces in all quarters; hence He is Visvakshena,the leader of the hosts everywhere. You give at one and the same time the four aims of life; and hence you are four-armed. The bow, *Sarnga,* that you wield, is the spirit of time with which you are ever ready to protect your devotees. Your divine form and beauty is enough to steal away the hearts of all. You are *Purusha,* as abiding in the heart-cave of all beings. ("They behold the *Purusha* as reclining in the cave of the heart-*Sruti)* (I am here before everything — hence my name *Purusha - Sruti)* (That *Purusha* pervades all the Universe - *Sruti).* You are the Purushottama ("All beings are known as *kshara;* the *kutastha* is named *akshara;* but I am above these two; I pervade this Universe and protect it . I am its ruler, eternal; and this is known in the world and in the *Vedas* as the Purushottama. *Gita-15).* You are the protector of those that seek you and there is none to cross your path. The sword *Nandaka* that you wear is the symbol of divine wisdom. You are named Vishnu as pervading everything. You extend your protection then and there over him, that deserves your grace, The root *krish* denotes the earth; and the letter *'na'* stands for happinness. So you are the Parabrahman itself with the name of Krishna, the giver of supreme happiness to all the worlds. You are the stay and support of everything. You are the leader of the Divine host; you are the dispenser of the fruit of actions, to all beings. When it is said that the gods protect all creatures, it does not mean that they tend them like cattle. "They give the highest intellect and reason to those whom they desire to protect". So he is the guide of all beings with regard to their intellect, patience and control of the senses. You are the source of this Universe and the place of its disintegration. (Krishna is the source and origin of all beings — They are absorbed in him — *Sruti).* You come down into the world as the next born to Indra. You slew the *asura,* Madhu, that made away with the *Vedas.* Your wealth and lordship is boundless. You are the lord of Lords. From your naval springs the lotus. That is the place of Universal evolution. You destroyed your foes in battles. They praise you as endowed with wisdom, power and compassion and the like excellences, that impel every one to seek your protection. This is the surest way to secure your favour and protection. (It confers supreme good on everyone that seeks Him. It is the most efficient means to win the Lord's help). You are the *Samaveda* embodied with its thousand branches ("Of the Vedas, I am the *Sama - Gita* 10).

You impel in various ways all beings to discharge their *nitya, naimittika* and *kamya* and ordinary duties. You are the witness to all acts. You are the Fashioner of the three worlds, the Fashioner too of myself and the other Gods; you know no over-lord. (The *Sruti* tells us that there is no Isvara over him). He graciously blesses with bliss like unto his own, the *muktas* and the ever-liberated ones

(Nityasuris). Towards their safeguarding, He manifests himself before them. You are sacrifice, *Vashatkara* and *Omkara;* as laid down in the *Sruti* "Vishnu is verily *yajna* embodied." You are the sacrificer, the chief figure in the sacrificial hall, you are the priest, the animal immolated, the cooked food offered, the ghee, the spoon, the ladle, instruments used therein; you are Indra and the gods invoked therein.

(Brahman is the offering, Brahman is the cooked food; is the fire, is the priest; meditating upon Brahman at all times, the celebrant attains Brahman — Gita 4-24). *Asravaya, Astusraushat, Yaja, Ye Yajamahe, Vashat, Vaushat* — you are adored by these seventeen letters. The single letter Om is Parabrahman — as from the *Sruti).*

You deserve to be adorned by the highest *Tapas.* The *devas* are ignorant of your origin of your disappearance, your inner nature, your relation to the *Vedas* and those that follow it. Your glory is great. You manifest specially in the Brahmins and cows, and generally in all creatures, quarters, the sky, the mountains and the worlds. Countless are your heads, eyes, and feet (*Purushasuktam*). Hari and Lakshmi are your consorts (*Purushasuktam*). You bear up great mountains, the earth and the other great elements; as the tortoise, you are the substratum of everything. At the last day when this earth vanishes into nothing, you contain in yourself the three worlds and everything thereon. You recline on the ocean of milk in the state of yogic sleep on Sesha, your serpent-bed. Markandeya and the other *rishis* are blessed to behold it; (Tirtha takes it that this is the Sankarshana manifestation known as Ananta). According to this vedic text, "the other Gods are the members of his body, I am your heart and Sarasvati your tongue."

The Gods are to Paraprahman like unto the hairs that arise from the body. The closing of your eyes is night, the opening thereof is the day; the *Vedas* are the breath of your nostrils. There is nothing anywhere of which you are not the Antaryami (inner ruler) (The *sruti* tells us that the breath of this Great Being is the *Rik,* and the *Yajus* and the *Saman* and the *Atharva-vedas*). The cosmic form the lord is here described.

The *Vedas* are the means of imparting to the worlds the knowledge of the path of action and detachment. ("You are the inner ruler of everything, conscious, or unconscious"). The entire universe forms your body. All functions, are carried on therein because of the fixity of your command; and all attributes and qualities thereof are yours too. The earth is your firmness embodied. (The *Vishnupurana* tells us that reverence has to be made to you, who is the earth embodied and who holds up everything through the might of your firmness). The fire is but your wrath; the moon is but your grace; and the mole Srivatsa on your breast is the same too. In the far past, you placed in bonds, Bali, the great *asura* and gave the three worlds to Mahendra as ruler; then the three worlds were measured by you in three steps. The lady Sita is but Mahalakshmi come down on earth and you are Mahavishnu. You took your place in the world of men to slay Ravana, the terror of the worlds; for you are the lord of all beings, and it is upto you, to bring to them lasting good. Your very nature and form consist in destroying wrong and establishing right. You gave ear unto our prayers, to rid the earth of Ravana and his *rakshasa*-brood. The purpose of your descent over, we pray you to come back to your seat on high. "Lord! resistless are your might, valour and prowess and ever fruitful. One never went back with empty hand from your presence. (It is hinted that this is the very purpose of the lord, walking among men).

Those that seek you with undivided devotion at all times and in all places, in thought, word and deed, seeing in you, the eternal one, the ancient god of gods, the ageless *Purusha,* and the Purushottama, the highest of the three *Purushas* - reap a golden harvest of joy and happiness and usefulness during their stay here, and have their fondest wishes achieved hereafter. Devotion unto you, is the highest of every kind of *Tapas,* to bring them to your feet. While those that are unable to do so, have but to recite the above hymn of praise with pious heart; and they have come among men for the last time. This hymn of praise is Vedic, eternal, knowing no beginning and hence of boundless potency".

CHAPTER 121

SITA COMES OUT OF THE FIRE

THE Lord of Fire listened to the happy and auspicious words of the grandsire, Brahma, cast away the logs of wood from the pyre and rose out of it in human form with Janaki in his lap. The lady Sita blazed in splendour like the morning sun. She was adorned with ornaments of molten gold. Her black and graceful curls added more lustre to her face. She shone forth in her strings and garlands of unfading flowers. In the same form in which she passed into the fire she came out stainless and with pure bright heart. The lord of fire bore her in his arms and handed her unto Rama; and being the witness to the actions and words and thoughts of all beings, he cried, "Lord." This is the very same lady Sita that passed into my flames. She knows not the slightest shadow of sin. You know full well that the lady Sita, dear unto you is stainless. But in the thought that your conduct should not be blamed in the least, you made her pass through fire. Matchless among those who establish virtue and the law! This lady was never known to address or lift her eyes towards or even to bestow a thought upon any man but yourself. She is the perfect exponent of the highest wifely virtues. (This places out of court the contention that the illusory Sita passed into the fire and the original Sita came out of it). Then how was it that Ravana took her away against her will? He was a *rakshasa,* matchless in strength and valour. There was none by her side to protect her. It was a lonely forest untrodden by the steps of human beings. Unable to take care of herself, grieved and weighed down, by your being away from her, she fell into the hands of another, and Ravana bore her to his ladies' apartments. There frightful *rakshasis* guarded her day and night. Not even for a moment did she look in thought to anyone other than you to save her; her thoughts were ever centred on you. Her mind, heart and intelligence were ever with you. She never wasted even a look at Ravana, though he and his brood threatened and tempted her ever so strongly. Their words never entered her ears nor did any chance idea of him darken her thoughts. Her heart is utterly pure. No speck of sin has any part in her being. Take her from me. Do not gainsay me and place my commands thereunto.

Thereat the heart of Rama was filled with boundless joy. The best and wisest of speakers, he grasped the import that lay behind the words of the lord of Fire. The embodiment of right and law, he said to himself, "It was not in vain that I put away Sita. The worlds above and below now know full well her greatness." Tears of remorse and sorrow coursed down his cheek, as he thought of the unmerited injury he had done her. He never forsook righteousness under any circumstances. In the power of protecting those who sought his shelter, there was none to approach him. His lustre and radiance was boundless, now that Janaki was by his side once more. He turned to Agni and said "The three worlds, know full well, that sin and Sita are as poles apart. Of spotless purity she is, yet the world's opinion is not to be slighted. She is herself able to cleanse the worlds of all impurity. Yet, she has stayed in the house of Ravana for a long time. "Rama is a boy. Being a slave to his love for her he has taken her back without any test of her purity. And it is no wonder for is he not the son of Dasaratha, who sacrificed his eldest son and the noblest to the whim of a woman, Kaikeyi, and sent him in to the woods. Such will be the talk of the world. Now this Sita is the daughter of Janaka, the ruler of Mithila, and knower of Brahman. She was born without human contact. There is no call, to speak of her conduct. She is ever devoted to me, she knows my heart, and anticipates my wishes; full well do I know that her thoughts have been ever centred on me alone. I was unconcerned as it were, when she passed into the fire, only to convince the three worlds, to reveal her real greatness and to set an example to others. Were the oceans ever known to overflow their limits? Ever guarded by the fire of her chastity and her innate radiance, she could not be approached by Ravana even in his dream. Her broad and lovely eyes were formed but to rain down sweet compassion and boundless wealth. But the slightest touch of wrath in them is quite enough to burn to ashes the countless worlds. Ravana fell a slave to the wonderful charm and beauty of Sita. Can a stranger dare to lift his eyes to her? Hence he was powerless to draw near her even in thought. Wicked he was and cruel; yet would any one clasp to his breast the blazing fire? His strength and prowess and wickedness made no impression upon her. She is not the one to be lured by his wealth or greatness or glory. As the rays of the sun can never be parted from him Janaki can never be away from my side. Is she not the one to share with me my boundless greatness and glory that is eternal, and beyond thought and speech. Fortune, wealth, happiness and auspiciousness flow from her gracious looks. The countless worlds, are filled with her splendour and purity. Is it ever possible for a great man to put away fame from him? Even so, I can never put her away from me. You are all my best of friends and held in great reverence by one and all. You are my best well-wishers. Good indeed is what you say beneficial to me. So it is but proper and necessary that I should obey your command''.

These words filled with joy the countless gods, monkeys, and the *rakshasas* and they rent the skies with his praise. Then Raghuvira took Sita to his side and his heart was full of joy. The soul of supreme bliss without the slightest taint of grief; the mightiest of the mighty; yet, he was the servant of *dharma* and did all this but to set an example to the world.

CHAPTER 122

RAMA AND DASARATHA

MAHADEVA then said to himself ''Brahma praised Rama to come to his seat on high, now that the gods have achieved their purpose. But I know that Rama's wish is to reestablish *dharma* that had been seriously deranged and confused. So he turned to Rama and said ''Lovely of eyes even as the red lotus! Adorned with the conch, the disc, the mace, and the other divine weapons, radiant with the mole *Srivatsa* on your broad breast, Lord, who annihilates his foes, by a thought of his, it is quite expedient that you should have done this, the flower and glory of the line of Ikshvaku who ever fulfil the *dharma* of Kshatriyas. The darkness of *adharmas* had begun to hang heavy over the worlds. This day you have laid low in battle that ten-headed *rakshasa;* you have extended your shelter and protection to all beings; you have uprooted vice and planted virtue. Bharata is grieved sore. Kausalya, your mother, pines with sorrow. Kaikeyi of no ordinary fame and Sumitra are eagerly expecting your return. It is to you to meet them and relieve their hearts of the burden of woe. You will be crowned as the ruler of Ayodhya; long gladden the hearts of your kith and kin, friends and subjects; rule over the land with justice; bring forth sons who will continue the Ikshvaku line and conduct many a horse-sacrifice; endow Brahmins with countless gifts; cover yourself with eternal fame and then come back to your throne of light. (The *Sruti* tells us that his eyes are like the petals of the lotus, kissed into wakefulness by the rays of the morning sun; and the *Smriti* speaks of *Purusha* with his eyes like the red lotus). (This attribute of Brahman hints that Vishnu who came down as Rama is the Parabrahman, that is as the end and aim of *Vedanta.* The reference to the heart of Vishnu tells us that he is ever to consort with Lakshmi. There is a justification for calling Kaikeyi as graced with no ordinary fame. Rama's exile to the woods, the grant of protection and refuge to the *Maharshis,* the favour and kindness shown to Sugriva, Vibhishana and Anjaneya, the slaughter of Ravana and the *rakshasas,* the conferring of peace and happiness on the worlds - all these are the outcome of her obstinate will and purpose. Sumitra who commanded her sons to accompany Rama to the forest was of prime use and importance in every one of the above acts and it is extremely necessary that Rama should lay his head at her feet. Mahadeva only repeats the words of Rama, who said before his coming down among man " I will remain upon earth as a king for eleven thousand years and go back to Vaikuntha"). Behold, your father Dasaratha has come down here in his car. He had your respect and reverence in the world of men; of boundless fame, it was given to him to have you as his son. He stays in the world of Indra, yourself and Lakshmana should salute your father who shines with extra-ordinary brilliance. (It was not possible for Rama to make out his father in his body of the God-world. Again he could not recognise him as he stood very near. So it was necessary to point him out).

Thereat Rama and Lakshmana bowed in salutation to Dasaratha who was in his celestial car. Blazing in his boundless radiance, adorned with magnificent garments and ornaments, he shone among the gods as his sons saluted him. Dasaratha too beheld his son dearer to him than life; boundless joy overcame him as he clasped him to his breast fondly, seated him on his lap, caressed his head and said "Child Rama, the joys and delights of *svarga* are nothing in my eyes. It is nothing that the *Devarishis* pay me every attention possible. It is your absence alone that could not be made up. Believe me, as you would the secred texts, my heart is even now cloven at the remembrance of the words of Kaikeyi that drove you to the woods. Would I forget it to the end of time? My eyes are blessed to behold you and Lakshmana. I had news of your well-being and sought consolation in it from my grief. The grief and ignorance that clouded my heart have been chased away by the sight of your face, even as the sun clears away the morning mists. You are to me the ideal son. In the far past, the *rishi* Kahola was raised to the worlds on high by his son Ashtavakra. Even so I was raised to this high seat among the gods solely through the might of your great self being born as my son. Kaikeyi and Mandara played sad havoc with the arrangement. I made for your coronation and sent you to the dark woods. I came to know later on that it was all a plan worked out by the gods. They desired to rid the worlds of Ravana and the *rakshasas,* and drew you away from the capital to the forests. There they caused Sita to be carried away. Rama! Kausalya is verily the most blessed in all the worlds; it is given her to see you enter the palace at Ayodhya, with victory on your arms, won from the dread field of battle, where your enemies lie dead. The people of Ayodhya are rich indeed in the merit they have laid by in the past; they would feast their eyes on the grand sight of your coronation as you are seated on the throne of the kings of the Ikshvaku line in the great hall at Ayodhya. Bharata's affection for you knows no bounds. Strong and mighty, yet, spotless in life, his foot never strays from the path of virtue; and you should grant his prayer to behold you once again. Noblest of men! I know full well that you are verily Mahavishnu who came down among men to rid the world of Ravana. I long to see you united with Bharata. You abode for twice seven years in the trackless forests with Sita and Lakshmana. Your exile is over, even as you passed your word to me. You slew Ravana and his dark brood and fulfilled the prayer of the gods; and their joy knows no bounds. You have indeed, achieved a feat impossible to others; and eternal and undying fame crowns your brows. Rule then this world for countless ages with Bharata, Lakshmana and Satrughna".

At this grand and mighty blessing, Raghuvira bowed low over folded hands, and said "Lord! I pray you extend your mercy and forgiveness to Kaikeyi and Bharata. I put you away from me for ever, you and your son Bharata was your terrible curse. May it cease to dog their steps". Then Dasaratha granted the request; and clasping fondly to his breast, Lakshmana who stood by in reverent affection, said "Child, you have gladdened my heart exceedingly by your devotion and loyalty to Rama and Sita. Rich is the harvest you have reaped as a reward for the most lofty *dharma.* It depends upon Rama to bless you with righteousness, broad fame, the joys of heaven, and greatness beyond measure. (It seems that Dasaratha was not aware of the divine nature of Lakshmana, as an essence of Vishnu). Let your life be one of long and perfect service to Rama. He is ever bent upon securing the highest good of all the worlds. These *siddhas* and *rishis,* the beings in all the three worlds, Indra and his gods, sing high his praise and offer him worship as the Lord Supreme. Brahma and others have opened my eyes to the great mystery that surrounds him. He is the inner ruler of all the gods; he takes on the form of fire and other gods and is worshipped in every kind of sacrifice. He is to be known only through the *Upanishads;* they know him not who lack devotion; he is free from all change and modification. In fact he is Paramatman himself, who has come among us as Rama. You have followed the path of righteousness in its most lofty reaches and you have won pearless fame in the battle-field. This is all due to your loyal and devoted service to Rama and Sita". Turning to Janaki, the king said "Rama acted as if he would speak to you harshly and put you away, simply to reveal to the worlds your greatness and purity. Harbour no thought of sorrow thereat. There is no need for me to instruct you regarding service to your husband. Yet, I must tell you that he is the god of gods for you". Thus did he instruct Janaki and his sons and went back to the world of Indra in his blazing car.

CHAPTER 123

INDRA GRANTS BOONS TO RAMA

DASARATHA took his way back to the heavens. Then Indra mightily pleased with Raghava who stood there with folded hands said, "Rama! It was not in vain that we sought you in prayer during the sacrifice that Dasaratha conducted to beget a son. We are now free of every kind of fear from Ravana. Pray let us know what you will have from us in return". "Rama, Lakshmana and Sita saluted him reverently; and Rama replied". If I have found favour in your eyes, I pray you, accept my request, and make your word good. The *Vanaras* that have cheerfully cast away their lives for me in battle and passed on to the world of Yama should come back to life. They have turned their backs on their sons, parents and kin. They made light of death, intent on my well-being; let such have their fill of joys and delights through your grace. This is my earnest prayer. I long to behold my friends, the *vanaras* and bears, to be relieved of their wounds and free from pain. May they be restored to their former strength and valour; and may they lead a joyous and happy life. All through the year may their haunts abound with fruits and roots for them to feed upon; and may the rivers and lakes ever be full and fresh". And to him replied Mahendra, "Raghava! your request is no ordinary one. It means that I should fit once more the scattered limbs of many to their right places; it means that I should bring back here those that have gone over to other worlds. But my word holds good for ever. Those *vanaras* and bears that have fallen in this battle by the hands of the *rakshasas* and those that have lost their limbs, will be whole again free from pain, and rejoice in their strength and valour as if they woke up after a peaceful sleep. They will lead a happy life in the company of their friends, kith and kin. Their haunts will teem with flowers, fruits, and roots during all the seasons of the year. The rivers will be ever full with clear, sweet crystal waters". And then those that were wounded came back to life, whole and clean. Those that lost their limbs found them back again. Thus did the monkeys come back from the other world in millions; and the other monkeys and *rakshasas* gazed at them in wonder and cried, "Strange! Wonderful!" and they could not gaze enough. Those that owed their rebirth to Rama, went round him in reverence and laid their heads at his feet.

Thus did Raghuvira effect his purpose and his heart was full of peace and joy. The gods lauded high the princes and said. "Make your way back from here to Ayodhya, Oh Rama! Give leave to the monkeys to go back to their haunts. Wipe away sorrow and grief from the heart of Sita. This gem of devotion and loyalty deserves it richly. Bharata and Satrughna have cast away behind them joy and comfort; they are observing the same stern vow as yourself. Their eyes are ever on the path that would bring you to them. Carry cheer and consolation to the hearts of the ladies Kausalya, Sumitra and Kaikeyi. May your subjects, friends and kin bless their eyes with the sight of our coronation at Ayodhya; rule over them in peace and righteouness." Thus did they shower blessings on Rama, and take leave of him to go back to their worlds. Radiant as the Sun, with heart dancing in joy, Rama saluted the gods in reverence and directed Lakshmana to assign quarters to the *vanaras* and they on their side guarded thus by Rama and Lakshmana waxed in fame and glory through their victory over the *rakshasas* and rent the air with shouts and roars; it was verily a lovely night illuminated by the full-moon.

CHAPTER 124

VIBHISHANA ENTERTAINS RAMA

RAMA abode there that night with his armies. Next morning Vibhishana touched his feet and spoke with folded palms, "Victory be ever thine, Lord! I have arranged everything necessary to give humble welcome to my friends, the monkeys and bears. To Lakshmana and thyself too, clear crystal waters to bathe in, scents, perfumes, garlands and chaplets, clothes and ornaments, powders and pastes, await your convenience. These lovely ladies are experts in the art of decoration. They await your pleasure in the matter of baths, dress and ornaments. I pray accept these marks of love, service and devotion from me and bless me out of your supreme grace." And to him replied Raghunatha, "Vibhishana, I believe that Sugriva and his heroic followers deserve these honours better. Bharata is eating his heart out to meet me. The soul of virtue, supremely worthy of enjoying comfort and peace, brought up in the lap of luxury, yet, mighty of arms and ever wedded to truth, he has vowed to me, "If I do not see you here back again, at the end of twice seven years, I will enter the fire and pass to the other world; and his words are never in vain. He has taken upon himself to observe a very stern vow only to see me back. What have I to do with baths or ornaments when that virtuous soul knows them not? Should I bring grief and sorrow to his heart even as Kaikeyi did? He rules over his people most righteously in the absence of King Dasaratha and myself. Banished from my presence for no fault of his, he subjects himself to hard and cruel penances only to see me back again. Is it meet that I should break my promise to him? I take my road to Ayodhya and will reach it soon through this route. Behold, it is far from here and I have no call to delay."

Then Vibhishana humbly submitted, "You need not waste a thought upon this. I will take you over there in a day. The son of the king, and the king yourself by right, you should enter Ayodhya with due honours, splendour and dignity. Ravana defeated Kubera in battle and took from him the car *Pushpaka*. It is radiant as the Sun. It can course anywhere at will; it has room enough for any number of travellers. I have to send it back to Kubera now that Ravana is dead. But I have not handed it over to Kubera when he came here with the gods. In it you can go back to Ayodhya as soon as you wish. Like the cloud sped by the storm, it flies with incredible swiftness; so you may rest in peace about the return to Ayodhya. Even though you would not have your bath here, I pray grace my humble abode with your lordly presence for atleast two or three days. If it is in your heart to bless me, if you have discovered any good trait in me, if it is true that I bask in the radiance of your affection, then thyself, Lakshmana, and Sita should stay with me for a while. My heart yearns to entertain, to the utmost of my humble ability, thyself, thy retinue, and thy armies. No preparations are necessary. I have all things ready to the last detail. Accept my humble service, make me happy by enabling me to realise my life's ambition, grant my heart's wishes, and then you are free to go back to Ayodhya. Do not take it then that I bother you in this way. I place my utter faith in the thought that my word will find favour in your eyes; you have already extended your love and affection to me and my own devotion and gratitude to you embolden me to take this liberty with you. Am I not your humble servant?"

Then Ramachandra made gracious reply to Vibhishana in the presence of the *rakshasas* and the monkeys. "Child! I take it that you have honoured me enough by your priceless aid, your valour in battle, and your matchless devotion. Far be it from my thoughts that I should not grant you your wishes. But my heart is eager to meet my dear brother Bharata without least delay. He put away the kingdom placed in his hands by my father; he sought me out at Chitrakuta and bowed at my feet entreating me to rule over the kingdom. He tries his very best to make me return to Ayodhya. But I could not act as he wished, him I must see at once. I must lay my head at the feet of the queens, Kausalya, Sumitra and Kaikeyi. I must meet my elders, my friends and kinsmen, their wives and children. Please therefore bring out the car *Pushpaka*. Now that I have completed my work here, I would linger no more. Delay would mean the passing of my dear Bharata, through fire to the worlds high. I am mightily honoured by the sentiments you have expressed and by your placing the car *Pushpaka* at my disposal. And so I take leave of you. Let not your heart grieve that I could not fulfil your wishes."

Then Vibhishana brought out the car *Pushpaka*. It was wonderfully decked in gold; platforms and halls inlaid with gems were found all over. It blazed in radiance and was splendidly decorated with snow-white banners and flags, golden lotuses and lofty storeys. It wafted sweet music from strings of bells on all sides and the large bells at corners. Garlands, chaplets and festoons, graced it everywhere, worked with pearls and gems and attached to the large windows. Lofty as the mountain Meru and spacious, it had many a curiously devised habitation; floors inlaid with gold, silver and crystal, priceless carpets and rugs over the countless seats and lounges, made one believe that he beheld in one spot the most valuable collection of the treasures of the three worlds. Nothing could stay its course, for it was swift as thought. And Vibhishana brought out this heavenly car and appraised Rama thereof.

CHAPTER 125

VIBHISHANA ENTERTAINS THE MONKEY-LORDS

VIBHISHANA brought over the car Pushpaka at the orders of Rama and told him of it. He drew near him and spoke humbly with folded arms, "Lord! I await your orders". And in reply, Rama having already known that Lakshmana would approve of it and having taken deep thought himself, gave expression to his love and affection for those that looked upto him for everything. "Vibhishana! These monkeys here have covered themselves with glory through their wonderful deeds on the battle-field. So let them have enough of garments, ornaments, gems, and gold. With the help of these we have captured Lanka which till then was impregnable. These have fought with untold energy, and reckless of their lives. With boundless courage they never turned their backs to foe. They have done their work most admirably. They deserve everything that I could do to them. Give them their fill of wealth and gems in return for what they have risked for me. This is the only way to express your gratitude for the help they have rendered you. It is in your hands to reward them or put an insult upon them. If you entertain them as I tell you, they will be mightily pleased thereat. Do not forget that it is to them you owe this kingdom of Lanka. Grieve not that you have to spend a very large amount upon them. The world will speak highly of you, as one who never says 'nay' to those that seek your help; as one who secures friends at any cost, and is gifted with boundless tenderness and fame. I speak but what seems to be good for you; never take it as an order. If the armies are not properly rewarded, it would bring evil upon us. It matters not that one is their lord and master they would abandon him at a most critical moment in fight, if he torments them or is bad-tempered in his dealings with them and does not reward them amply and treat them with kindness and consideration, and in your case all this needs no stressing.

Vibhishana received the orders of Rama with respect and entertained the monkeys as became their status, ability, and valour, with gems, wealth, ornaments, and garments. Then Rama, Sita and Lakshmana ascended the car *Pushpaka*. Raghuvira placed Sita on his lap, and spoke to the monkeys and the *rakshasas,* "Vibhishana, Sugriva! best and bravest of monkeys! you have rendered me without stint every kind of help that one can hope for from one's friends. I give leave to all of you to go back to your favourite homes. Sugriva! you have discharged most faithfully the obligations of a friend with flaming heart and fear of wrong. Make your way back to Kishkindha with your armies. Vibhishana! rule with vigilance over this kingdom of Lanka, which I have placed in your hands. Do not, like Ravana, invade other kingdoms and torment their peoples. (It suggests that the guards placed in Janasthana by Ravana should be recalled to Lanka): Indra and the gods and *asuras* too dare not lift their eyes to you. I go back to Ayodhya, the capital of my father. You all, those that follow you, have my leave to go and I take leave of you in my turn" (There was no other woman about and Rama placed Sita on his lap. She bowed her head slightly at this act of tenderness done in the presence of all. Lakshmana stood behind Rama with the *kodanda* in his hand).

The monkeys, *rakshasas* and Vibhishana hastened to reply with folded palms, "Rama! we are eager beyond words to follow you to Ayodhya, you must take us with you, we will never be guilty of spoiling your gardens, tormenting your people and bringing havoc to your towns and woods; we will be most careful about how we behave there. We must feast our eyes and our hearts with the grand function of the coronation. We must lay our heads at the feet of the lady Kausalya, who is the fortunate mother of the best and noblest of sons; Then alone shall we reap the benefit of our countless births, and we long to behold the lords, Bharata and Satrughna, that came into the world with you and likewise the people over whom you rule. Then it will be time for us to go back to our place." Rama replied them "What more can my heart desire than to go with you to Ayodhya? You have taken to me as the life of your lives; you have borne for me untold trouble, danger, and privations, each and every one of you, find a place with me and this car *Pushpaka;* not a single soul should stay back. Vibhishana, you may come along with your counsellors. Dear to me is my victory over Ravana and my meeting with Sita; to meet Bharata once more is dearer; but it is dearest to me to go back to Ayodhya with you." Then Sugriva and his monkeys, Vibhishana and his ministers got into the aerial car *Pushpaka*. It sprang into the air at the orders of Raghava and sped with the speed of thought. Seated on the car adorned with golden swan, Rama was lauded by the monkeys and *rakshasas* and his heart knew boundless peace and joy as he shone like Kubera, the regent of the quarters. Monkeys and *rakshasas* ranged freely and comfortably in it and had everything that their hearts could desire.

CHAPTER 126

RAMA POINTS OUT TO SITA THE RETURN ROUTE

AT the orders of Rama the *Pushpaka* sped on lightly, as if it were a huge cloud-bank lashed by storms. Then Raghunandana glanced all round carefully and pointed out to Sita seated on his lap, the various places of interest over which they passed on. Janaki was filled with joy at being reunited to her beloved lord and with her face beaming like the full-moon expressed supreme wonder and pleasure as she beheld them. "Look, yonder Lanka, on the crest of Trikuta, like unto the Kailasa Mountain. This was fashioned of yore by Visvakarma. Behold the battle-ground of *rakshasas* with ourselves, now hidden under layers of blood and flesh. Here countless monkeys and *rakshasas* found their ways to other worlds. Behold, there Ravana lies, a heap of ashes. Wonderful boons did he get from Brahma; he was the holy terror of all the worlds. He was the lord of the *rakshasa*-empire, and him did I slay to get you back. Here Kumbhakarna gave up his life-breaths and it was here that Nila did Prahasta to death and here Hanuman made short work of Dhumraksha. It was here that Vidyunmali fell under the hands of Sushena. Mark this spot where Lakshmana had a terrible fight with Indrajit and killed him. Angada took the life of Vikata and it was here monkey-heroes beyond count proved the death of

Virupaksha, Mahaparsva, Mahodara, Akampana and the other *rakshasa*-warriors. It was here that Mandodari, the chief queen of Ravana, and thousands of her rank wailed and lamented for him with streaming eyes and heartrending cries. It was here that we camped on the night of our crossing over to Lanka. Behold the bridge laid over the waters by Nala. It was for yourself that we passed through all this trouble. These lovely eyes were the cause of it all, were they not? Know you of any other who can achieve the same feat? Cast your eyes on the home of Varuna, the lord of the waters. There is no island here for tired feet to rest upon. The billows roar for ever. Look here, you find the mountain Mainaka with its crests of gold. Here did Hanuman rest for a while during his flight across the sea. Cast your eyes over our camping spots along the cause-way over the frightful ocean. Here you came upon the northern end of it. This spot is very very holy; the blackest of sins, fall away before it. Here did the Lord Mahadeva favour me before (a deal of controversy is indulged in by the commentators on this *sloka,* all out of sectarian intolerance. The natural meaning is as is given above. But Vaishnavite feeling would not admit that Vishnu took a favour from the hands of Siva. Hence they twist the stanza to read that it is the lord of ocean that is referred to; since there is no record of Rama receiving any assistance from Mahadeva in the matter of the laying of the cause-way. But the word Prabhu, 'Lord', is quite against the water king, whom no body would claim as above Sri Rama. If they object to the word being used in connection with Siva himself, why speak of a petty ruler whom Rama punishes for disobedience and threatens to exterminate. The *Ramayana* never goes on war-path against Mahadeva or takes a brief for Vishnu or Rama. Of course Govindaraja and his followers would have it so. They go so far as to reject the *Adityahridaya* of Agastya, simply because they would not have Rama (Vishnu) pray to the Sun god and take a favour from his hands, though the *Upanishads* tell us that it is He that dwells in the Solar Orb as its Highest Soul. Again they cannot deal in the same way with Rama asking a boon from Indra in the matter of the monkeys who are revived. If Valmiki makes no particular mention of any action of grace by Siva, it matters not. On more than one occasion, Valmiki relates events retrospectively). Vibhishana came and surrendered unto me a little to the north of this place. Look here! Here is

Kishkindha with its magnificent forests. This is the capital of Sugriva. Here is the place where Vali was vanquished and killed by me."

Pleased at the site of Kishkindha, Sita entreated Rama in haste, and out of love towards him "Lord! I pray that Tara, the wife of Sugriva, and the wives of the monkey-hosts may accompany us to Ayodhya." Rama said "Let it be so" and stopped the *vimana* in front of Kishkindha and spoke to Sugriva thus : "Sita desires that your wife and the wives of the monkey-lords should accompany us to Ayodhya. So bring them quickly". Immediately Sugriva sent for Tara from his palace and said "Janaki desires that you should go with her along with our women-folk. Rama too orders likewise. Let us all go to Ayodhya, see the wonders there and visit the queens of Dasaratha. Do no delay". Adorning herself with clothes and ornaments, she sent for the wives of the other monkeys and addressed them. "Our lord orders that we should all proceed to Ayodhya. You should obey this command even for my sake. Let us therefore go and see the wonders and greatness of Ayodhya, witness Sri Rama's entry into the capital, be present at his coronation and visit the queens of Dasaratha. Prepare to start quickly." Then all the women of Kishkindha adorning themselves with auspicious decorations and ornaments ascended the Pushpaka and bowed to lady Sita.

Then the car *Pushpaka* ascended (into) the sky and traversing through its regions approached the Rishyamuka Hill. Rama said "Sita, Look! There at Rishyamuka Hill, resplendent with creepers and roots like unto the cloud-banks lit up with lightning, I met Sugriva. I vowed here that I would kill Vali. And yonder appears the Pampa river with its wondrous woods. It was there that I suffered long and deeply your separation. On its banks, I was met and entertained by Sabari. Look here! This is the spot where I killed Kabandha with arms one hundred *yojanas* long. There you see the great banyan tree which was the abode of Jatayu, the great soul. It was there that the friend of my father fought Ravana and was killed by him while attempting to rescue you. We now see the *asrama* in Panchavati, where we lived. It was here that the *rakshasas,* Khara, Dushana and Trisiras were vanquished and killed in battle. Behold the wonderful hut wherefrom the *rakshasa*-chief carried you away by force. The river Godavari is now within view with its sparkling waters; the abodes of the *Maharshis,* Agastya, Sutikshna, shining with the pure splendour of sanctity are now to be seen. Indra came to see the *Maharshi* Sarabhanga when we were halting there. Look at the spot where Viradha of mountainous bulk was laid low. Tapasvins are to be seen in the *asramas*. The *asrama* of *Maharshi* Atri, who shines like the lord of fire and the lord of day, is now within sight. It was here that Anasuya, the incarnation of chastity, offered you hospitality.

We are now in Chitrakuta. It was here that my dear brothers entreated me to return to Ayodhya. Near this spot are to be seen the Yamuna, with its beautiful forests and in their midst is the resplendent *asrama* of Bharadvaja. In the centre of the wondrous woods, Ganga courses purifying and sanctifying the places touched by her. Birds of brilliant and varied hue sport on its waters. Yonder appears Sringiberapura where Guha entertained us with pomp and splendour. Now appears Sarayu, the holy river. On its banks are to be seen the pillars of fame erected by the successive kings of Ikshvakus at the end of numberless *yagas* performed by them. Adorned with variegated flowers and shrubs, forests range far and wide along its two banks. Ayodhya, the capital of the kings of the Solar race, is now visible. We have returned with safety. Do obeisance to that holy city.

Thus addressed, all the monkeys, *rakshasas* and Vibhishana sprang high and saluted that holy and grand city and the birth place of Sri Raghuvira. The *vanaras* were delighted at the sight of the palaces shining resplendently, of many-storeyed mansions and of elephants and horses, magnificent to behold. The city was as wonderful as Amaravati, the capital of Indra.

CHAPTER 127

RAMA AT THE HERMITAGE OF BHARADVAJA

AT the end of fourteen years on the fifth day of the bright fortnight in the month of Chitra, Rama and Lakshmana reached the hermitage of Bharadvaja and made their obeisance to the *rishi*. (It was on the same fifth day of the bright fortnight of the month of Chitra that Rama, Lakshmana and Sita had started from Ayodhya. That night they had stayed on the banks of the Tamasa river; they had spent the sixth day at the Sringiberapura, the seventh day under the banyan tree, the eighth day in the hermitage of Bharadvaja and the ninth day on the banks of the Yamuna. Learning through Guha's followers that Rama would reach Chitrakuta on the tenth day, Sumantra returned to Ayodhya that evening. That night Dasaratha passed away. On the eleventh day his body was immersed in a pot of oil. On the twelfth day messengers were sent to bring Bharata. They travelled on the thirteenth and fourteenth days and reached the capital of Kekaya on the night of the full-moon. On the first day of the dark fortnight, Bharata started for Ayodhya. Halting for seven nights enroute and travelling without a break on the eighth day, he entered the city of Ayodhya at sunrise on the ninth day. The funeral of Dasaratha was done on that day. On the following 12th and 13th days thereafter, that is on the fourth and fifth day of the bright fortnight in the month of Vaisakha, Bharata performed the obsequies for Dasaratha. According to the local custom, the immersion of the ashes was carried out on the sixth day. On the seventh day Bharata ordered the servants to lay roads in the forest. This work went on till the tenth day. On the eleventh day Bharata started in quest of Rama. That night he halted on the banks of the Ganga. On the twelfth day he stayed with Bharadvaja and on the thirteenth he met Rama. For three days, on the fourteenth, the full moon and the day following it, he stayed with Rama. On the second day of the dark fortnight of the month of Vaisakha he started back for Ayodhya and entered the city on the fourth day. On the fifth day

Rama left Chitrakuta, visited the sages Atri and others and came to Panchavati, where he spent thirteen years. In the fourteenth year in the month of Chitra, Sita was carried away by Ravana. In Vaisakha Rama met Sugriva, Vali was killed in Ashadha. In Asvayuja the monkey-army was assembled and in Phalguna Rama reached the seashore. On the fourteenth day of the bright fortnight the monkeys set fire to Lanka. On the new-moon day Ravana was killed. In the fifteenth year, on the first day of the bright fortnight of the month of Chitra, Ravana was cremated, Vibhishana was crowned on the second day, Sita was reunited to Rama and the Devas blessed them on the same day. Leaving Lanka on the third day, Rama reached Kishkindha on the fourth day. On the fifth day he arrived at the hermitage of Bharadvaja. On the sixth day he was at Nandigrama, removed his matted locks and entered Ayodhya. On the seventh day Sri Ramachandra was crowned as King of Ayodhya in the most auspicious hour, the star of the day being Pushya).

Rama asked of Bharadvaja "Holy one! Is all well with those at Ayodhya and Kosala? Do all people live happily without famine, epidemics or floods? Does Bharata protect the people according to *dharma?* Do the queens live in sound health?" With a smile on his face and joy in his heart, Bharadvaja replied, "Bharata eagerly awaits your return every minute with matted hair and dust-laden body, the kingdom is ruled with your sandals before him. All the family are well. When I saw you last, you were clad in tree-bark and deer-skin and ready to enter the forest. Losing the kingdom that was yours by right, desiring only to obey your father, holding on to *dharma,* discarding all pleasures, you came here on foot accompanied by Lakshmana and Sita. I grieved to see you giving up everything in deference to Kaikeyi and living on roots and fruits like one that has fallen down from heaven after having enjoyed the fruits of former good deeds. And now I rejoice to see you back, your task accomplished, and your foe destroyed. Your victorious return to Ayodhya with friends and retainers makes me supremely happy. I know full well all the good and evil that befell you. Promising to protect the brahmins and the sages you killed Khara and the *rakshasas* at Janasthana; Maricha in the guise of a deer lured you away from your hut; Sita was carried away by Ravana. The death of Kabandha at your hands; the friendship of Sugriva which you secured at Pampa; the killing of Vali; the search of the monkeys for Sita; the valourous deeds of Hanuman; the disçovery of Sita; the building of the bridge by Nala; the burning of Lanka by the monkeys; the death in battle of Ravana, who had been the terror of all creatures, the destruction of his kith and kin and the army; the grant of boons to you by the blessed gods; all these have been known to me through my *tapas*. I too give you a boon now. Stay here for a day, accept my hospitality and depart for Ayodhya tomorrow''.

Rama bowed low in acceptance of his words. He decided to send Hanuman, to carry to Bharata the good tidings of his return, felt happy and prayed, "Great one! Let the trees on the path along which I and my friends go to Ayodhya be full of flowers and fruits dripping honey''. Bharadvaja said "Let it be so''. The trees on that road for a distance of three *yojanas* began to resemble those of heaven. Trees that had never borne fruits now had abundant of them, the trees and plants that had known no flowers now blossomed forthwith with sweet-smelling flowers; dried up trees revived and put forth tender shoots; honey began to stream out from the fruits and flowers. The monkeys in thousands were greatly pleased at the sight. They ate the fruits and drank the honey, sweet as nectar and rejoiced like the gods in heaven.

CHAPTER 128

RAMA SENDS MARUTI IN ADVANCE TO BHARATA

WHEN Raghava thinking of Ayodhya, called Maruti and spoke to him, "Go thou in haste to Ayodhya and find out if Kausalya and the other women of the palace are well. Meet Guha at Sringiberapuram and greet him on my behalf. He will be mightily pleased to hear that I am now carefree and happy after having killed my enemies and achieved my purpose. Regardless of his caste, I consider him as a member of the royal family because of his devotion to me and my love towards him. He will acquaint you with the road to Ayodhya and tell you about Bharata. Tell Bharata that with Sita and Lakshmana I am here, having returned safely and that I send him my good wishes."

"Let him know now that my father's task has been fulfilled. Let him hear from you of Ravana's carrying away Sita, of my friendship with Sugriva, the killing of Vali, the search of the *vanaras* for Sita, your exploits in Lanka and your discovery of Sita, my meeting with the ocean god, the construction of the dam by Nala, the killing of Ravana and *rakshasas,* the granting of boons by Brahma, Varuna and Indra, Dasaratha's appearance before me, thanks to the grace of Paramasiva and of my return here. As yesterday the period of fourteen years of my exile was completed, he may sacrifice himself in the fire, on failing to see me again. If you tell him the news of my arrival, the shock of joy might endanger his life. Tell him first that Vibhishana with his *rakshasas* and Sugriva with his monkeys have come along with me. Observe carefully his face to discover his real feelings towards me. Tell him, "Having killed his enemies, Rama has achieved unequalled fame; having fulfilled his mission, he has returned accompanied by powerful allies," and note his reactions and see whether his face changes. I must find out whether he will agree if I tell him, 'You may rule this kingdom yourself.' The reason why I wish to test him is this; who is the man that does not desire to possess a kingdom handed down by his ancestors endowed with many elephants, horses and chariots, and capable of giving all he wants? Would Bharata accept the kingdom out of joy and seeing me back after fourteen years? Would he reject the offer? If he has become attached to the kingdom, let him continue to rule as he has ruled for fourteen years in deference to my wishes. My father passed away without tasting the happiness of seeing me crowned. Let me, at least, feel happy to see Bharata crowned. Before I left Ayodhya I liked to witness Bharata's coronation and tarried a while. But Kaikeyi mistook my action and thought that I was unwilling to give up the kingship and leave the country. If Bharata now seems inclined to cling to the power which he has enjoyed so long, return to me before we have advanced very far much nearer to Ayodhya and let me know. Otherwise, stay on with Bharata. (Rama knew full well the heart of Bharata. But following the rule of testing even one who is greatly devoted and loving, Rama feigned some doubt of Bharata's intentions. Fearing that his sudden appearance might lead to Bharata's suffering from an excess of joy, he sends Hanuman in advance to announce his return. Maruti, too, who understood the purpose of Rama, came back not with any report but with Bharata himself).

Hanuman in the guise of a man hastened to Ayodhya, even as Garuda rises aloft and flies through the sky after snatching up a great snake. Passing over the confluence of the Ganga and the Yamuna, the valiant Hanuman arrived at Sringiberapura. Approaching Guha he spoke auspicious words, greatly pleased. "Friend! your beloved friend, the valiant Raghava, the greatest of the Ikshvaku clan, along with Lakshmana and Sita has sent me to tell you that he is well. Tonight he stays with Bharadvaja, and tomorrow he will be here."

Saying this, Hanuman leapt into the sky and flew over Ramatirtham, Valukini and Gomati. Seeing countless people and many flourishing villages, he flew with all speed and came upon the forests adjoining Nandigrama. There he saw women and children playing as the *devas* sport in Nandana, the garden of Indra. At Nandigrama on the outskirts of Ayodhya, he came upon Bharata wearing bark and deer skin, emaciated and with matted locks living like a hermit and anxiously looking in the direction of Rama's return. With his mind, senses and speech controlled intensely, concentrating on his inner self and glowing like a Brahmarishi, he looked after the people under the auspices of the sacred sandals. Assisted by able ministers and holy purohits, he was protecting the four castes against all perils. His ministers, the army chiefs and all others around him were all robed in the garb of *rishis* even as he. Born of Dasaratha the king, he was brought up on opulance; but he has discarded all pleasures, in strict obedience to *dharma*. When he is observing silently the austerities of the *rishis,* it is not right and proper for us to live in ease and pleasure, they thought.

With palms folded Hanuman approached Bharata and addressed him; "Lord! Raghunatha, the son of Dasaratha, who went to the Dandaka forest like a *rishi,* who promised to return after fourteen years and whose absence you have endured so long sends you his greetings. I bring you good news. You will see Rama shortly. After killing Ravana and the *rakshasas,* rescuing Maithili and fulfilling his mission, he returns accompanied by many friends. Soon you will see Rama with Lakshmana and Sita who is reunited with Rama even as Sachi is with Indra'' (As Hanuman and Bharata were strangers, Hanuman did not salute Bharata. But as he joined his palms when he appeared before Bharata, it may be taken that he did obeisance to him. Or it may be that he thought that if he unnecessarily delayed the news of Rama's welfare by indulging in salutations Bharata might end his life; the news of Rama's return was more important than the usual courtesies, which could be attended to later. Or it may be that Maruti forgot, in his joy at seeing the devotion and greatness of Bharata, to salute him).

Hearing those words, Bharata was overjoyed. ''When will my brother arrive? When can I see his comely face and when shall I bow at his lotus feet?'' He fell in a faint. Recovering shortly, Bharata embraced Hanuman who had uttered such heartening words and bathed him in streaming tears of joy, (The mere tidings of Rama's return had such an effect on Bharata; what might not have happened if Rama himself had appeared suddenly? It was because he feared the consequences of such surprise that Rama had sent Hanuman in advance). Though you appear to be a man yet when I see your splendour, I wonder whether you are not a god. Whoever you are, you have come here out of pity for me and told me good news which has brought me back to life. Though I cannot reward you adequately let me do what little I can. Accept my presents joyously and bless me. Kindly accept a crore of cows, a hundred villages and sixteen maids to wed. They are well-born, beautiful beyond compare adorned with jewels and pure in thought and deed''.

Hearing thus the news of Rama's return, with mounting desire to see his brother, Bharata spoke again to Hanuman out of the fullness of his heart.

CHAPTER 129

THE MESSAGE OF MARUTI TO BHARATA

"FRIEND! It is now many years since my lord went into the Dandaka forest. Now only have I good news of him. I find that the saying that even if one has to wait for a hundred years for happiness one finds it at last true. How did Raghava and the monkeys come to be friends, where and what for? Tell me." (By this query Bharata appears to have learnt of Rama's meeting with the monkeys in Kishkindha and their march to the South" — Govindaraja. Or possibly Hanuman, being addressed "Art thou god or man?", had replied that he was a minister to Sugriva, the king of the monkeys, and the devotee of Rama).

Thus questioned, Hanuman was mightily pleased with the opportunity to describe the deeds of Rama and said, "Lord! You know how Rama was exiled as a result of the two boons to your mother by the king, how Dasaratha died of grief for the separation of his son; how messengers brought you back to Ayodhya; how you refused to accept the kingdom; how you, though fit to rule the earth, went to Chitrakuta and offered the kingdom to Rama and entreated him to return to Ayodhya; how he refused your request and how you returned with the sacred sandals" (Hanuman retraces the past step by step to infuse confidence in Bharata).

"Let me recount what happened after your return to Ayodhya. The birds, beasts and the sages in the wood were greatly disturbed by the sight of strangers and the movement of the army. Rama and Lakshmana therefore entered the Dandaka. While passing through that terrible forest filled with wild elephants, lions, and tigers there appeared before them Viradha, the *rakshasa*. He was killed and buried in a big pit. That evening they reached Sarabhanga's hermitage. When the sage ascended to heaven, they paid their respects to all the *rishis* and went to live in Janasthana. While there, the *rakshasi* Surpanakha implored Rama to take her as his wife. Her ears and nose having been cut off by Lakshmana, she appealed to her relatives, Khara and Dushana, for revenge. They used to molest the ascetics and defile sacrifices. They, with fourteen thousand *rakshasas,* attacked Rama. They were all killed within a *yama* (fourth part of a day) by Rama single-handed. Surpanakha then approached Ravana, who directed Maricha, disguised as a golden deer, to play before the *asrama* within sight of Sita. Seeing the lovely deer set with gems she said to Rama eagerly "Dear! This creature is very beautiful. Capture it for me. It will add to the charm and beauty of our abode." Then Rama carrying a bow, went a long way in pursuit of the deer and killed it. Maricha, before dying, cried out, simulating Rama's voice, "Ha! Lakshmana! Ha Sita!!" Hearing the cry, and fearing some mishap to Rama, Sita sent out Lakshmana. At that time Ravana entered the hut and carried away Sita, as the planet Budha grabs Rohini. Jatayu, the eagle, Dasaratha's great friend, fought terrible battle with Ravana, trying to stop him. Wounding Jatayu mortally, Ravana resumed his journey through the sky. With Sugriva and other monkeys I was then seated on the Rishyamukha hill. All of us wondered when we saw a *rakshasa* dragging away a most beautiful lady, who was crying out, "Rama, Rama". Ravana then entered Lanka and placing Sita in his palace, tried, in many ways to mollify her and make her accede to his wishes. Sita however treated him as a speck of dust and with all her thoughts centred in Rama, ignored the *rakshasa* completely. Ravana then imprisoned her in the *asoka* grove with *rakshasis* to guard over her.

Having killed Maricha, Rama returned to his abode and finding that Sita was missing, he began to search for her. He grieved to see Jatayu mortally wounded; he heard from him what had happened to Sita; and when Jatayu died, Rama performed the cremation ceremonies for him. Searching for Sita thereafter, Rama and Lakshmana came to the banks of the Godavari and entered the greatest forests in the neighbourhood. There they found Kabandha the *rakshasa* and killed him. At his bidding the two went to Rishyamuka hill and met Sugriva there and Sugriva and he liked each other at first sight. Sugriva was then hiding in the Rishyamuka hill having been driven out of his kingdom by his brother Vali. As they told their stories to each other and saw how they could be mutually helpful, their friendship grew. Vali, the mighty, was then killed by Rama, Sugriva was made the chief of the monkeys and ruler of their kingdom. Sugriva then vowed to find out Sita for Rama. A hundred million monkeys were sent in all directions to search for Sita. Of these, we who had been sent to the South lost a great deal of time in the Vindhya mountains. Then we heard from Sampati, the brother of Jatayu, that Sita was kept in custody in Lanka.

"When the *vanaras* that were with me were filled with dismay as to how to cross the ocean, I flew across the distance, of one hundred *yojanas,* and reached Lanka. There I beheld Sita in the *asoka vana,* wearing a single peace of cloth, alone, torn by grief, and with her thoughts centred on Rama. Approaching her and acquainting her with all that had happened, I gave her the ring sent by Rama as a token of recognition and then won her confidence. Having heard her reply and receiving the *Chudamani* (crest jewel), I recrossed the ocean and came back to the *vanaras* who were mightily pleased with the news. The reply of Sita was conveyed to Rama and the *Chudamani* was handed over to him. The news that Maithili was alive revived Rama even as a draught of nectar restores to life one who is almost dead.

Rama made up his mind to destroy his enemies like the sun destroying the universe during Pralaya. He came to the ocean shore with the monkey-armies and made Nala construct a bridge over the ocean. Crossing over he besieged Lanka. Prahasta was killed by Nila, Kumbhakarna and Ravana by Rama, and Indrajit by Lakshmana. Then Indra, Varuna, Yama, Paramasiva, Dasaratha and the *devarshis,* appeared before him and granted him various boons. The dead monkeys were restored to life. Accompanied by them all, he came back to Kishkindha in the *Pushpaka* car. Today he is with Bharadvaja in his hermitage on the banks of the Ganga. Tomorrow, when Pushya rises, he will be here". Bharata, who with palms joined heard Hanuman speak thus, worshipped Rama mentally and said, "Anjaneya! After all, my heart's desire is now fulfilled" and thus filled the heart of Hanuman with gladdening words.

CHAPTER 130

THE REUNION OF THE BROTHERS

BHARATA, rejoicing at the news, spoke thus "Satrughna, let all the temples in the city be decorated with flowers and filled with incense. Let everyone in the city, the singers, story-tellers and messengers, the musicians, the Brahmanas, the Kshatriyas, the leaders of the different castes, proceed with their ladies to meet Rama and behold his glorious face." Satrughna then bade workers, who did not care for wages as follows : "From here to the city of Ayodhya, make the ground level and sprinkle it with ice-cold water, sprinkle flowers and fried grain and fly banners and buntings in the streets. Every house should be beautified in all ways possible. Place on the thoroughfare garlands of various coloured flowers."

The women of the palace, and the ministers Dhrishti, Jayanta, Vijaya, Siddhartha, Arthasadhaka, Asoka, Mantrapala, Sumantra and others rode forth on elephants. The Brahmanas, Kshatriyas and the chiefs of the different orders and the women-folk of the warriors came out of their respective vehicles such as horses and cars. Countless warriors, cavalry men, charioteers, and foot-soldiers set out with their weapons. All the wives of Dasaratha with Kausalya, and Sumitra at their head and followed by Kaikeyi, left for Nandigrama in their carriages (Bharata neglected to send for Kaikeyi. So she appears to have come later to Nandigrama). The entire population of the City of Ayodhya, with none left behind came to Nandigrama. The earth reverberated with the sound of horse hoofs, chariot wheels, drums and trumpets. Followed by the chiefs of the Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and the headmen of villages with the ministers carrying offerings, with the sound of conch, trumpet, *vina,* drum and flute and with singers singing their song of praise, Bharata, with Rama's sandals held aloft above his head, set out from Nandigrama to meet Rama, while the white umbrella adorned with white garlands was spread overhead and two fly-whisks set with gold fanned him. Emaciated by fasts, covered with dust, wearing bark and deer-skin, Bharata was overjoyed at his brother's coming. Looking around and not sighting Rama or his followers, he turned to Hanuman and said "I do not see the jewel of the line of Ikshvakus. Did you say he was coming, prompted by the irresponsibility of your kind? Even supporting Rama in some distance behind, where is the army of monkeys? As the monkeys can assume any form they please they should show themselves in some shape or other, even if they do not appear as monkeys." Hanuman replied, pointing out the cause of the delay, "Bharadvaja and Indra granted boons to Rama as a result of which the trees give an endless supply of fruits, flowers and honey. The monkeys are drinking the honey and enjoying themselves. Rama and the army were given a great feast by Bharadvaja. Their return is therefore delayed a little, I hear the happy noises made by the monkeys. They are now crossing the Gomati river. See the great cloud of dust rising up. They have now reached the Valukini. Methinks the monkeys are now resting among the palm trees eating their fruits. I can now see the *Pushpaka* bright as the moon in the sky it was the creation of Brahma and given as a gift to Kubera; it has the speed of thought; and Rama got it by killing Ravana and his followers."

As the car with Rama and Lakshmana accompanied by Sita, Sugriva and Vibhishana came within sight, young and old, women and children shouted for joy "Here comes our Rama". Getting down from their chariots, elephants, horses and other vehicles, the citizens saw him in the car shining like the full-moon. Bharata with folded palms and with ecstatic tears streaming down his eyes welcomed him. Rama, with a long and wide eye-lashes shone like Indra in that car created by Brahma. As Rama came and stood in front like the sun shining on Mount Meru, Bharata prostrated himself before him. Raising him up and seating him on his lap, Rama embraced Bharata with love and joy. Then Bharata embraced Lakshmana who prostrated before him. He then bowed low to Sita (Some think that Bharata protested against Lakshmana prostrating himself before him, when Rama the eldest was present. Since

Bharata bowed to Sita after Lakshmana offered his salutation it would appear that Sita was seated at a little distance away and in the midst of the *vanara*-women). Then Bharata embraced Sugriva, Jambavan, Angada, Mainda, Dvivida, Nila, Rishabha, Sushena, Nala, Gavaksha, Gandhamadana, Sarabha, Panasa and other monkey-heroes, all of whom had assumed the forms of men. They in turn greeted him. Then turning to Sugriva he said, "Thou art a brother to us four. To help is the mark of a friend, to injure that of an enemy". Then addressing Vibhishana with soft words to comfort him in his bereavement, he said "Friend! It was through your help that Rama, Lakshmana, and the monkeys accomplished this great task". Satrughna then saluted Rama, Lakshmana and Sita with great reverence. Then Rama coming over to where his mother was, prostrated himself before her, embraced her feet and said "Mother, you should not be angry with me for having gone to the forest without paying heed to your words. You have experienced misery on account of me. Pardon me for my lapses. This minute all your miseries are over", and he comforted and gladdened her thus. Then paying his respects to Sumitra, Kaikeyi and his other step-mothers, he came to his preceptor, Vasishtha, and saluted him. (Is not the love of Dasaratha for his son Rama borne out of the fact that he died of a broken heart when he sent Rama away to the forest at the bidding of Kaikeyi? Is not the love and devotion of Bharata for Rama evidenced by the way Bharata went after Rama into the forest and entreated him to return to the kingdom? If Ravana did not carry away Sita, how could the glory of Anjaneya and the friendship of Sugriva shine? If Rama had remained in Ayodhya, how could Lakshmana have served Rama as he did? If Sita had not accompanied Rama and been abducted by Ravana, how could the world know her purity and her motherly love for all? How could the prowess of Rama and the glory of his bow have been proclaimed if he had not killed Ravana and the *rakshasas?* But for Kaikeyi, Ravana and the *rakshasas,* who could suppose that Ramachandra, the idol of all creatures in all the worlds, could have any enemies? Did not all these attain importance because Kaikeyi brought about the banishment of Rama, the divine qualities of the lord and therefore deserves all credit?).

The citizens greeted Rama saying "Rama, Kausalya's darling! Welcome to you!" When they saluted Rama in reverence, their joined palms looked like buds that had bloomed. Then Bharata took those sandals and with his own hands set Rama's feet upon them, saying in all humility, "This kingdom was entrusted to me by you. I ruled it, to the best of my ability. Now I return it to you. Pray, accept it. Today, with you back in Ayodhya as its ruler, I am happy and content. Please inspect the treasury, the granary, the city, the armies and the bastions. Thanks to your grace, all of them have been multiplied ten times."

The monkeys and Vibhishana shed tears of joy at the sight of the love between the two brothers and the confidence each had in the other. They heaved a sigh of sorrow at the thought, "Were not our families ruined for want of this unity, confidence and affection?" Then ascending the *Pushpaka* car and seating Bharata on his lap Rama reached Nandigrama. There descending from the celestial car he sent it back saying "Go back now to serve Kubera". The wonderful car, thus directed by Rama, went northwards where lay the city of Kubera. Then Raghava touched the feet of his *guru,* offered him seat and sitting alongside of him shone brilliantly even as Indra does with Brihaspati.

CHAPTER 131

THE CORONATION OF SRI RAMACHANDRA

(FOREWORD : Having returned the celestial car back to Kubera and having resolved not to enter Ayodhya without the permission of Bharata, Rama stayed at Nandigrama. The citizens of Ayodhya too stayed with him there, anxious not to be deprived of his company. Kausalya and the other ladies of the palace were around him. Assessing the intentions of Rama from a physiognomical study, Bharata laid bare his heart to Rama).

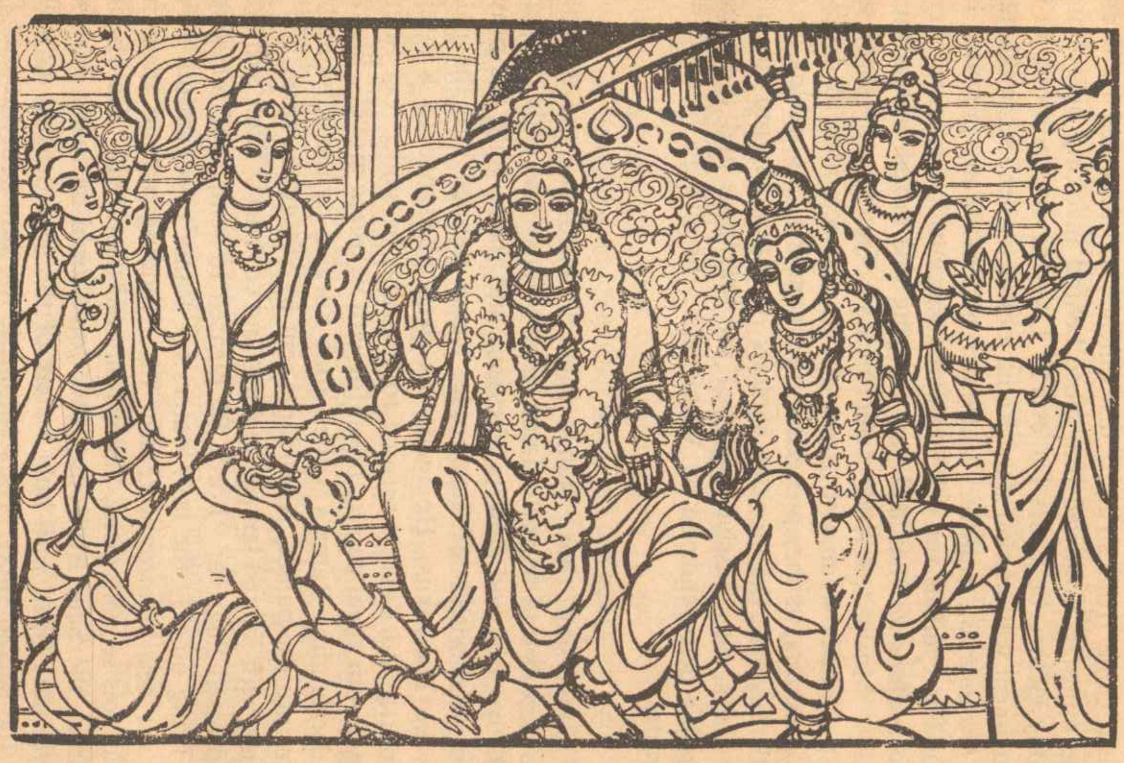
With his folded hands raised above his head, Bharata spoke thus to his valiant brother : "Lord, you gladdened the heart of my mother by giving up the kingdom of Kosala and setting off to live in a forest. At Chitrakuta, you entrusted it to me. And now I restore it unto you. You may say, 'Return it to me only when I want it back and till then, keep it yourself. Leave me free to live happily in Ayodhya enjoying all pleasures, free from the cares and anxieties of the State. You had better continue as our ruler." How can a calf carry a burden that was borne by a strong bull? I can bear no more the groaning weight of a kingdom. You may ask, 'How then did you do it so long?'. It is no bed of roses to keep intact a kingdom. As the banks of rivers and lakes have to be fortified with trees and other revetments to prevent the flood-waters from breaching them, so has a kingdom to be protected with great care, and this is no easy task. You may again ask, 'Can you not win the confidence of the people with kingly qualities even as I?' What a world of difference between the fleet horse and a slow-paced donkey or between the common crow and royal swan? Can another set foot on the path that you tread? But you may say, 'Let me assist you when you rule.' There was a gardener who planted a seed in a fertile soil and devoted all his time and care to the rearing of it. In good time, the seed sprouted; it became a plant; it grew into a mighty tree that hid the earth and the sky with its dense foliage. No one dare to go up among its branches. It was almost invisible beneath its mantle of flowers. But if it bore no fruit, not a single one, just imagine the cold misery of him who planted it and reared it so carefully, all eager to enjoy the fruit of his labours.

For sixty thousand years, our father lived without a baby. After performing *Asvamedha* and *Putrakameshti* sacrifices did he beget you. You have been endowed with the sublime virtues and have been brought up in the midst of pomp and splendour. Our father's desire was to entrust the kingdom to you and so enjoy the fruit of all his labours. You are our lord, our master, our protector; do you not fail in your duty if you do not watch over our safety? In spite of your being possessed with all royal qualities, if you should refuse to reign over the kingdom which has been ruled all along by the eldest sons of the Ikshvaku race through successive generations, of what avail would be the efforts and wishes of our illustrious father? And the illustration above will apply to you. It will be an insult to your intellect if I offer an interpretation of it."

"Grant this world the pleasure and privilege of beholding you crowned in all glory and installed on the throne of the Ikshvaku today, resplendent as the midday myriad-rayed Lord of the day. May you wake up at sun rise, hearing the pleasing music, the sweet melody of many instruments and the jingling sounds of waist-belts and anklets of dancing damsels. *You are indeed the fittest person to enjoy all pleasures.* Say not, 'Are not all of you my brothers and should not you too like to rule the kingdom?' As long as the Sun, the Moon and the stars exist, and as long as this earth has its being, so long shall you be the Lord and master of all here."

Rama accepted the offer of Bharata and took his place on an auspicious seat. At the orders of Satrughna, skilled and quick tonsorial artists waited upon Raghava and his three brothers, and their matted hair was neatly removed. When Bharata, Lakshmana, Sugriva and Vibhishana had bathed, Rama and Lakshmana were adorned by Satrughna with the rare and beautiful garlands perfumed with sweet scents, and were robed in silken garments and bedecked with various ornaments. The queens of Dasaratha themselves dressed Sita. Kausalya, on account of her boundless affection towards her son Rama, did herself all that was necessary to adorn Tara and other *vanara*-women. Then at the instance of Satrughna, Sumantra, the royal charioteer, brought the glittering chariot yoked with caprisoned horses of noble pedigree. Delighted at the sight of the chariot which was shining like the Sun, Rama took his seat in it. Sugriva and Hanuman, clad in the best of clothes and adorned with jewels, and looking like Mahendra, accompanied Rama. Sita and the wives of Sugriva, similarly bedecked gorgeously went with them eager to see Ayodhya. At Ayodhya, Vasishtha and the other ministers of Dasaratha were busy collecting the auspicious materials required for the coronation of Rama. Asoka, Vijaya, and Sumantra addressed Vasishtha, "May you perform all the due ceremonies for promoting the prosperity of the country and for ensuring Rama's health and happiness, wealth and welfare!" and then left the city to meet Rama. Even as Devendra journeys in the celestial car drawn by the divine horses, Rama shone in all his glory in the chariot and set off towards the capital. Bharata, sitting by the side of Sumantra, held the reins and guided the chariot. Satrughna supported the white umbrella of the Ikshvaku kings; Lakshmana waved the chowry over his head and also fanned him. (Since he is the greatest of the great in his all round dedicated service to Rama, he appears to have taken upon himself both the services). Vibhishana, the king of the *rakshasas,* waved the other chowry. The sky was melodiously charged with the sweet music of the *devas, gandharvas, yakshas, vidyadharas, uragas, garudas, pannagas, siddhas, sadhyas, nagas,* and *maruts,* who were eulogizing Rama for having delivered them from the clutches of the *rakshasas.* Sugriva rode on the back of Satrunjaya, the mountain-like elephant, and shone brilliantly like Indra on his Iravata. The *vanaras,* assuming the forms of men and bedecked with all kinds of jewels, rode on nine thousand elephants. Raghuvira sped towards the city with the blare of the conches and *dundubhis,* while sweet strains of music came from stringed instruments accompanied by drums. The ministers followed him close behind invoking benediction, "May victory be yours for ever!" Like the silvery moon in the firmament with myriad stars, Rama looked resplendent in the midst of *brahmanas,,* ministers and other citizens. Many preceded him sounding cymbals and other similar auspicious instruments. Virgins and *brahmanas* marched past carrying rice mixed with turmeric dust. Many carried sweetmeats. Cows of rare and best qualities went with them. As Rama recounted in detail to his ministers, as they proceeded, the manner of his making friends with Sugriva, the glorious exploits of Hanuman and the other monkeys, the massive might of the *rakshasas* and the equally massive help rendered by Vibhishana, the citizens listened with wonder.

Conversing thus, Rama entered Ayodhya, the home of prosperous and happy citizens. Every house was gaily decorated with wreaths and flowers, festoons and flags. With the prayers and good wishes of the people, Rama stepped into the palace of the Ikshvakus. He made his deep obeisance to Kausalya, Sumitra and Kaikeyi turning to Bharata, he said, "Let Sugriva stay in our royal palace, beautiful with its *asoka* grove". Bharata, understanding Rama's wishes, took Surgiva by the hand and led him into the palace. Attendants sent by Satrughna furnished the home with lighted lamps, couches and coverlets. Then Satrughna addressed Sugriva: "Lord! Be pleased to send your messengers to bring quickly the holy waters for Rama's coronation." Four of the best *vanaras* were sent for. Handing over to them four gold pots set with gems, Sugriva directed them thus: "Oh *Vanaras!* Before the Sun rises tomorrow, you should be ready here with these pots filled with holy waters of the four oceans, as well as of the sacred spots. Thus enjoined, the powerful *vanaras* flew with the speed of Garuda. Jambavan, Hanuman, Vegadarsi, Rishaba and others fetched in golden pitchers holy water from the five hundred rivers — Sushena from the Eastern Ocean, Rishaba from the Southern Ocean, Gavaya from the Western



Ocean and Nala from the Northern ocean. When the *vanaras* had completed their task, Satrughna and the ministers informed Vasishtha and other friends.

THEN VASISHTHA OF THE ANCIENT DAYS, THE PRIEST OF IKSHVAKU RACE WITH HIS MIND AND SENSES SERENE, HAVING OBTAINED THE ASSENT OF THE *BRAHMANAS,* INSTALLED RAGHAVA AND SITA ON THE THRONE BEDECKED WITH GEMS. AS THE VASUS ENTHRONED INDRA EVEN SO DID VASISHTHA, VAMADEVA, JABALI, KASYAPA, KATYAYANA, SUYAJNA, GAUTAMA AND VIJAYA — THE EIGHT *MAHATMAS* — ENTHRONED SRI RAMACHANDRA, BATHING HIM WITH PURE AND FRAGRANT WATER TO THE BEATIFIED CHANTING OF THE *VEDAS.* THE SACRIFICIAL PRIESTS AND THE *BRAHMANAS,* THE VIRGINS AND THE OFFICIALS, THE *KSHATRIYAS* AND THE *VAISYAS,* SPRINKLED ON RAGHUVIRA HOLY WATER MIXED WITH THE JUICES OF CELESTIAL HERBS.

THE REGIONS OF THE SKY WERE THRONED WITH THE JOYOUS *DEVAS* AND THE GUARDIAN DEITIES OF THE FOUR QUARTERS, SATRUGHNA HELD ALOFT THE WHITE UMBRELLA; SUGRIVA WAVED THE WHITE *CHAMARA;* THE LORD OF THE WINDS, SENT BY INDRA, GARLANDED RAMA WITH LOTUS WREATHS MADE OF GOLD PETALS, AND WITH STRINGS OF PEARLS OF DAZZLING BEAUTY. THE *DEVAS* AND *GANDHARVAS* SANG RAPTUROUSLY. THE *APSARASAS* DANCED WITH GRACEFUL SKILL. THE EARTH WAS COVERED WITH PLENTY; THE TREES WERE LADEN WITH FRUITS. THE FLOWERS BREATHED SWEET FRAGRANCES.

Raghunatha then presented to the *Brahmanas* and other guests hundreds of cows and calves, bulls, horses, thirty crores of gold coins and all kinds of ornaments and clothes. Sugriva was presented with a garland made of gold, inlaid with many gems. Vali's son, Angada, was the recipient of a pair of bracelets set with diamonds. Sri Rama gave Sita a garland of pearls and precious stones which shone like the rays of the moon. She, in her turn, looking significantly at her lord, with his implied consent, gave to Hanuman the gift of a pair of noble garments and beautiful ornaments. (It was the intention of Rama that Sita should present Anjaneya with her own hands the wreath of pearls that was given by him). Then taking the garland from her neck, she looked again and again at the monkeys and at her Lord. ("Was it not the wish of Rama, when he gave this garland to me in the midst of the assemblage, that I should present it to somebody here? Who is the worthy person to receive it?" Such were her thoughts). Rama, who knew what was passing in her mind, said to her, "Give it to him with whom you are most pleased; to him whose manliness, prowess, and intelligence are great beyond comparison. (Maruti proved his manliness by crossing the ocean; his prowess by setting fire to Lanka; and his intelligence by seeking all over Lanka and finding her in the *asoka* grove). Without hesitating, she put the garland on the neck of Hanuman who then shone like the mountain-top, girdled by white moon-lit clouds.

Rama then presented Mainda, Dvivida, Nila and other monkeys with suitable and worthy gifts of garments and ornaments (according to their deserts). Vibhishana, Sugriva, Hanuman and Jambavan and other monkey-chiefs who also received worthy presents of gems, jewels and other precious things left for their homes. The *vanaras,* mightily pleased at the sight of the coronation, returned to Kishkindha. Vibhishana, the king of the *rakshasas,* received as a gift the "Srirangavimana", the ancestral wealth of the Ikshvaku lineage, and left for Lanka. (Mahesvara Tirtha's comments : Here the term ancestral wealth, refers to Lanka which has already been presented to Vibhishana by Rama. The interpretation that the term 'Srirangavimana' referred to here does not therefore aptly fit in. In the original text (131.90) the word 'Ikshvaku' does not find a place before the words 'ancestral wealth'. In the *Uttararamayana* (108.31) it is stated that when Rama went back to Vaikuntha, the purpose of his incarnation having been achieved, he presented Vibhishana with the 'Srirangavimana'. In the *Padmapurana* it is said that Rama blessed Vibhishana thus : "You shall rule the kingdom so long as the sun and moon shine on the earth; then come and join me." He then presented to Vibhishana the heir loom "Sri Ranganatha").

Then, Rama ruled over the kingdom, cherishing his subjects, as if they were his own children and punishing the evil-doers. He said to Lakshmana, "Brother, thou art well-versed in *dharma!* Share with me the burden of kingship which has been borne so ably by our ancestors. But Lakshmana, in spite of persistent persuasions, would not agree. Bharata, the Mahatma, near and dear to Rama, was then consecrated as Yuvaraja. Countless sacrifices — the *Paundarika, Asvamedha* and *Vajapeya* and others were performed by Rama. Thus He ruled for eleven thousand years, doing hundreds of horse-sacrifices in which he made large gifts of money. With arms reaching down to his knees, shoulders mighty as the Meru mountain, famed for his prowess, ever waited upon by Lakshmana, he lorded over the earth. He pleased the Gods by performing many a sacrifice along with relatives and friends.

When Rama reigned, women never lost their husbands; there was no occasion for them to lament at all. No danger was there from wild animals and none suffered from disease. Nor was there any fear from thieves. No one was touched by hardship. No occasion arose for the old to perform the obsequies of the young. Everyone lived happily ever wedded to *dharma.* Following in the footsteps of Rama, the people refrained from injuring one another. They lived for the span of a thousand years, begetting thousands of children and untouched by sickness or sorrow. When Rama ruled, the name 'Rama' lived ever on the lips of men and they talked all the time of his noble deeds and character. The whole world, nay, every action therein, was Rama-intoxicated; throughout the year, the trees grew luxuriously with branches, flowers and fruits. The clouds shed rain in proper season and the winds blew gently. *Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas* and *Sudras* were all free from avarice and followed dutifully their own professions with contenment and joy. Ever wedded with *dharma* and truth, the subjects were endowed with excellent qualities and engaged in the practice of virtue. With his brothers always in attendance, Rama reigned for eleven thousand years with pristine glory.

This first and grandest epic — a mighty repository of the priceless wisdom enshrined in the *Vedas* — was composed in the far past by Maharishi Valmiki. It confers on kings long life, fame, victory and every other blessing desired. He who reads it or he who hears it is cleansed of his sins. Do you desire offspring from your loins? You fail not to get it. Is wealth your object? You have it as much as you wish. The king triumphs over his enemies and rules the lord of the earth. The woman that listens to this holy narrative with a heart full of devotion, rejoices in her length of days and wealth of children and grand-children even to the seventh remove, like unto the queens of Dasaratha, who saw the lord himself come down unto the earth as children of their loins and rejoiced in everything that this world can give and the next. Anger and her sister passions find not a place in the heart of him who listens to the world of Valmiki. He puts away all misery behind him for ever. The wanderer in strange lands is restored to the bosom of those that love him. Sri Rama is ever ready to gratify his requests. The Shining Ones are delighted beyond measure. The evil powers that may infest his house become his very friends and benefactors. Young women do bring forth excellent sons to gladden their hearts. Those of the royal race that listen to it with a devout heart from some good Brahmana, are ever blessed with wealth unbounded and offspring numerous.

Sri Ramachandra is ever pleased with one who regularly reads or hears the whole of *Ramayana,* for is he not Mahavishnu, the Eternal, the First and Foremost of the Gods, the Mighty Lord of the Lords, Hari and Narayana? In short, an evergrowing circle of kinsmen, abundance of wealth and corn, faithful and devoted wives, perfect health, long life, fame and upright heart, spiritual splendour, good brothers and everything that the human heart can wish for — all this and much more form the meed of him who studies, with a pure heart and devout, the noble epic of Valmiki.

Thus has been narrated this epic story of events that happened in the far remote past. May everything, good and gracious, go with you. Speak out the words, "Let the boundless might of the Lord Vishnu, that baffles word and thought, grow for ever through countless worlds". Speak it without a shadow of shyness or a glint of misgiving; speak it with a heart unclouded with doubt or uncertainty.

When the *Ramayana* is read or heard, all the gods are filled with perennial delight. The manes are gratified when one lends one's willing ear to the recital of *Ramayana*. Those who write with devotion this holy composition of Sage Valmiki abide in the world of the gods.

अलं शास्त्राभ्यासैः अलमसकृदाम्नायपठनैः
अलं तीर्थस्नानैः अलमखिलयागव्रतजपैः ।
अलं योगाभ्यासैः अलमपि महापातकभिया
यदस्माकं रामस्मरणमहिमा सा विजयते ॥

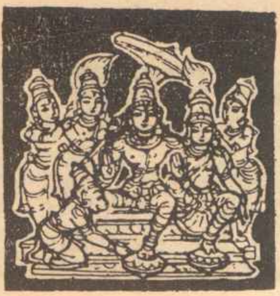
No more of the laborious exercises in learning shastras. Enough of recitations of the Vedas endlessly. Enough of dips in sacred waters. Enough of all the Yagas, Vratas and other Japa. Enough of Yogic exercises. Victory unto Rama whose contemplation destroys all fears of even the greatest sins.

— RAMAKARNAMRITA.

शत्रुच्छेदैकमन्त्रं सरसमुपनिषद्वाक्यसंपूज्यमन्त्रं
संसारोत्तारमन्त्रं समुचितसमये सङ्गनिर्याणमन्त्रम् ।
सर्वैश्वर्यैकमन्त्रं व्यसनभुजग सन्दष्ट संत्राणमन्त्रं
जिह्वे ! श्रीराममन्त्रं जप जप ! सततं जन्मसाफल्यमन्त्रम् ॥

Rama Mantra is the most effective weapon in destroying the enemy; which is worshipped by the Upanishadic expressions; which will help one to rise above samsara; *which will enable one to get rid of attachments at the opportune time; which confers every kind of wealth; and which can revive one from the bite of the snake sorrow. O tongue! Repeat always this Sri Rama Mantra which will make life fruitful.*

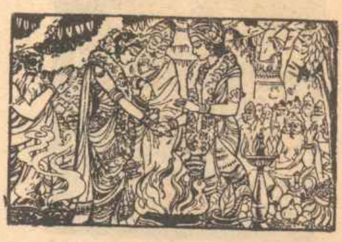
— RAMAKARNAMRITA.



व्यामोहप्रशमौषधं मुनिमनोवृत्तिप्रवृत्त्यौषधं
दैत्योन्मूलकरौषधं भवभयप्रध्वंसनैकौषधम् ।
भक्तानन्दकरौषधं त्रिभुवने सञ्जीवनैकौषधं
श्रेयः प्राप्तिकरौषधं पिब मनः श्रीरामनामौषधम् ॥

Oh mind! Drink the medicine in the form of Sri Rama's name which will remove all infatuations, which will give one the mental attitudes and beatitudes of great munis; *which will uproot all the demons, which will annihilate the cycle of births and deaths, which gives endless bliss to its devotees and which is an effective life-giving medicine in all the three worlds and which fetches one all the virtues!*

— RAMAKARNAMRITA.



KALYANA-RAMA

मैथिल्यानगरे विवाहसमये कल्याणवेद्यन्तरे
सामन्ते विमलेन्दुरत्नखचिते पीठे वसन्तौ शुभे ।
शृण्वन्तौ निगमार्थवेदिविदुषा माशीर्गिरां राजितौ
पायास्तां सुवधूवरौ रघुपति श्रीजानकीराघवौ ॥

May the Janaki-Raghava pair protect us who, at Mithila, at the time of their marriage, seated before the marriage-fire, on the auspicious seat studded with resplendent gems, listening to the blessings of those well-versed in the Vedas and their meanings, are shining gloriously.

— RAMAKARNAMRITA.